

ACTS

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Acts, sometimes called the fifth Gospel, is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Dr. Luke is the writer, as he states in his introduction ([v. 1](#)). Sir William Ramsay, after making a critical study of Luke's writings, declared that Luke was the greatest historian, ancient or modern.

The Book of Acts is remarkable in many ways. It is a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles. The New Testament without the Book of Acts leaves a great yawning gap. As Dr. Houston puts it, "If the book of Acts were gone, there would be nothing to replace it." The last recorded fact about Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is the Resurrection, which is recorded in [Acts 1](#). In the Gospel of Mark, the last recorded act of Jesus is the Ascension, which is also recorded in [Acts 1](#). In the Gospel of Luke, the last recorded fact is the promise of the Holy Spirit. That is also in [Acts 1](#). And in the Gospel of John the last recorded fact is the second coming of Christ. You guessed it -- that is also in [Acts 1](#). It is as if the four Gospels had been poured into a funnel, and they all come down into this jug of the first chapter of the Book of Acts. Also the great missionary commission, which appears in all four Gospels, is confirmed in the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts furnishes a ladder on which to place the Epistles. It would be an enriching experience to read them together, as Acts gives the history of the founding of the churches to which the Epistles are directed.

The Book of Acts records the beginning of the church, the birth of the church. The Book of Genesis records the origin of the spiritual body which we designate as the church.

The theme or key to the Book of Acts is found in [Acts 1:8](#): "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The book divides naturally according to this key verse. The first seven chapters record the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in Jerusalem. Chapters 8 through 12 record the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in Judea and Samaria. The remainder of the book is devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The Book of Acts is not complete. It breaks off with Paul in his own hired house in Rome. It has no proper ending. Do you know why? It is because the Book of Acts is a continuing story. Perhaps the Lord has Dr. Luke up there writing the next chapters now. Perhaps he is recording what you and I do for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. I hope so.

Some special features of the Book of Acts are:

1. Prominence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus has left His disciples now. He is gone. He has ascended in the first chapter of the book. But He is still at work! He has just moved His position, His location. He has moved His headquarters. As long as He was

here on this earth, His headquarters were in Capernaum. Now His headquarters are at the right hand of the Father. The Lord Jesus Christ is prominent. He is at work from the vantage place of heaven itself.

2. Prominence of the Holy Spirit. Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit. This promise is mentioned in the Gospel of John four times ([John 1:33](#); [John 7:37-39](#); [John 14:16-17](#); [John 20:22](#)). The same promise is given in the Book of Acts ([Acts 1:8](#)). You and I are living in the age of the Holy Spirit. The great fact of this age is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers.

3. The power of the church. There is a power in the church and, of course, this is the working of the Spirit of God. That power of the early church is not manifested in churches today. Why? Because the early church operated on a high spiritual level which has not again been attained in any age since then. However, it is the Holy Spirit working through the believer when any service brings honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Prominence of the church, visible and invisible. The church is a new institution. It has come into existence in the Book of Acts.

5. Prominence of places. The book begins at Jerusalem and ends in Rome. Sir William Ramsay checked all the places mentioned by Dr. Luke and found them to be accurate.

6. Prominence of persons. Dr. Luke mentions 110 persons by name, besides the references to multitudes or crowds. I believe that by the end of the first century there were millions of believers in the world. The church had a phenomenal growth in those first two to three hundred years. It certainly has slowed down today, exactly as our Lord said it would.

7. Prominence of the Resurrection. The Resurrection is the center of gospel preaching. In too many churches today, we have one Easter sermon once a year. As a pastor, many times I have featured Easter in August. People would come just to find out what had happened to the preacher. They thought the heat was getting to me. However, in the early church the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the very center and heart of the message, and no sermon was preached without it. The theme of Peter on the Day of Pentecost was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He explained that what was taking place on that day was because of the fact that Jesus was now in heaven at the right hand of God and had sent His Holy Spirit into the world. It was all due to the Resurrection. You will find that the Resurrection is the very heart of the messages of Paul.

There are a great many people and preachers who like to "ride a hobby." Some people like to ride the hobby of prophecy; others dwell on the Keswick message or some other facet or phase. Now, if you want to ride a hobby, let me suggest one for you: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the early church, every Sunday was Easter, a day to proclaim the Resurrection. "He is risen!" was proclaimed everywhere (see [Matt. 27:64](#)).

8. There is a prominence of Peter in the first section of the book and of Paul in the last section. There is a strange omission of the other apostles. God had good reasons, I am sure, for emphasizing the ministry of these two men.

Also there is a human reason. I believe that Dr. Luke was acquainted with the ministries of these two men. He was an associate of Paul. Some people hold the idea that there was a disagreement between Peter and Paul. Very candidly, I am of the opinion that Dr. Luke and Peter and Paul got together a great many times and had many talks.

The proper title for this historical book has always been a problem. The Bible which I use is the authorized version and there it is called The Acts of the Apostles. The Codex Vaticanus and the revised versions also call it The Acts of the Apostles. Robert Lee called it The Acts of the Ascended and Glorified Lord. The Bantu title is Words Concerning Deeds.

I would rather think that the key is given to us in the first two verses of the first chapter. On the basis of this, I would venture a title which is a rather long one: The Lord Jesus Christ at Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles.

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Chapter 1

THEME: Preparation for the coming of the Spirit

As suggested in the Introduction, in my opinion the proper title for the Book of Acts would be: The Lord Jesus Christ at Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. And the first seven chapters reveal the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in Jerusalem. The first chapter, which is the preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit, includes a brief introduction; a resume of the forty-day post-resurrection ministry of Jesus; His ascension and promise of return; then the apostles waiting for the Spirit, and their appointment of an apostle to take the place of Judas.

Introduction (1:1-2)

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen [[Acts 1:1-2](#)].

The "former treatise" was Luke's Gospel, which also was directed to Theophilus -- whose name means "lover of God." I totally reject the idea that just any lover of God is intended. Obviously Luke knew a man by the name of Theophilus, and undoubtedly the

name was appropriate -- a lover of God. Luke's Gospel was "all that Jesus began both to do and teach," and in the Book of Acts Jesus continues to do and to teach. Today He is still at it, if I may use that expression, and He will continue on with this present program until He takes His own out of the world.

"Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost [Spirit]" makes it clear that just because Jesus was taken up into heaven didn't mean He ceased doing and teaching. But now, from the vantage place of the right hand of God, He is continuing to work through the Holy Spirit. As in the army where commands pass from one man to another, so the Lord Jesus Christ is working through the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit operates through the apostles and on out to you and to me where we are today. This is a remarkable statement here.

Forty Days Post-resurrection Ministry Of Jesus (1:3-8)

Dr. Luke uses one of his periodic sentences here, which continues on through [verse 4](#).

To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God [[Acts 1:3](#)].

He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs after His suffering and death. There are ten recorded appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. His post-resurrection ministry, as revealed in His appearances, has a more important bearing on the lives of Christians today than does the three-year ministry recorded in the Gospels. I have a little book entitled *The Empty Tomb*, which tells of this post-resurrection ministry of the Lord Jesus. Paul stated it this way: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more" ([2Cor. 5:16](#)).

You and I do not know Him today as the One who walked on this earth over nineteen hundred years ago. We know Him as the one Man in the glory. He is up there right this moment, and He is real. How often the church loses sight of this fact.

Recently a letter came to me from a person who said he had been a church member all his life. He had gone through all the prescribed rituals, and he thought he was a Christian. Then through hearing the Word of God he learned that he didn't even know Jesus. The wonderful discovery for him was that not only did Jesus walk on this earth nineteen hundred years ago, but also He is alive today and is sitting at God's right hand. He came to the living Christ and received Him as Savior and Lord. How wonderful that is! Jesus showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs.

The problem of the unbeliever today is not with the facts but with his own unbelief. The facts are available. I wonder whether anyone doubts that the Battle of Waterloo was a historical event. Very frankly, I believe that Napoleon lived, and I believe that he fought the Battle of Waterloo. But I have very little evidence for it. Actually there is ten thousand times more evidence for the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ than there is for the Battle of Waterloo, and yet there are people today who say they do not believe it. Where is the problem? The problem is in the heart, the unbelieving heart. There is a natural tendency for man to run away from God just as Adam did. Man turns

his back upon God today. If you are an unbeliever, the problem is with you. The problem is not in the Word of God. He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. You can know if you really want to know. The problem is that you don't want to know. The problem is not in the mind; the problem is in the will.

Let me insert a comment here about the Resurrection. There is a verse which I think has been twisted and distorted. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" ([John 12:32](#)). How was He lifted up? He was lifted up in the Resurrection, friend, lifted up from the dead. That is the message. Regardless of how much you talk about Jesus or how lovely you say that He is, the message is that He has been lifted up from the dead. He is risen! The reason that more people are not drawn to Christ is that there is not the preaching of a resurrected Christ. How the Book of Acts puts the emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me [[Acts 1:4](#)].

That's the end of the sentence -- these first four verses are all one sentence! The apostles are to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Until that event takes place, His command is to wait.

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence [[Acts 1:5](#)].

The risen Jesus appeared to the apostles and gave them these instructions. He tells them that something is going to happen to them. They are going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence. This baptism of the Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father, and Jesus had previously told them about it.

It is very important to point out that this is not talking about water baptism, which is ritual baptism. This is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is real baptism. It is this baptism of the Holy Spirit which places a believer into the body of believers, which we sometimes refer to as the church.

When we get to the second chapter, which tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, we will learn that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Filling was necessary in order that they might serve. The fact that they were filled with the Holy Spirit for service indicates that the other ministries of the Holy Spirit had been performed.

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? [[Acts 1:6](#)].

You will find that some of the commentators rebuke the apostles for asking this question -- they feel the apostles made a mistake. I believe that the answer the Lord gives them indicates they made no mistake. Their question was a legitimate question, a natural question, and one that our Lord answered as such. He did not rebuke them. He did not call it a foolish question.

The apostles were brought up and schooled in the Old Testament. They had waited for the coming of the Messiah. They understood that the Messiah is the One who will establish the Kingdom upon this earth. That was their hope. It is still the hope for this earth. God is not through with this earth. God does not intend to sweep this earth under the rug. Although it is small enough to be swept under His rug, He is not going to do that. God has an eternal purpose for the earth. It was the Kingdom of God that they talked about, which involves the re-establishment of the house of David. These were the things He talked about after His resurrection -- we see in [verse 3](#) that He spoke of things "pertaining to the kingdom of God."

And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power [[Acts 1:7](#)].

He let them know, at this particular time, that the Kingdom would not be established. Rather, He would call out a people to His name, the church. In chapter 15 of Acts, when the apostles met for the first council in Jerusalem, James pointed out this fact: "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" ([Acts 15:14-18](#)). This is what God is doing today. He is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people to His name. That is, God is calling out of the world those people who will trust Christ, and the Holy Spirit baptizes them into the body of believers, the church.

So when the apostles asked Jesus whether He would restore the Kingdom "at this time," His answer was that this was not the subject for discussion at that time. Nor is it the subject for discussion today. There are a great many people who say to me, "Don't you think the Lord will be coming soon?" Well, now, I'll let you in on something that is confidential between you and me: I do believe that He is coming soon. However, I don't have any authority to tell you that He is coming soon, because I don't know. Our Lord said it is not for us to know the times or the seasons. That is not the important part for us.

I do believe in prophecy. However, I think one can overemphasize it. To be built up in the faith you need more than a prophetic study.

Then what is our business today? Notice again that the Lord did not rebuke them. Instead, He showed that He had something else in mind. There is something else for us to do. It is not for us to know the times nor the seasons -- the Father has put those in His own power -- but here is your commission:

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth [[Acts 1:8](#)].

This is the commission that still holds for today. This is not given only to a corporate body, to the church as a body; it is not a corporate commission. This is a very personal command to each believer -- personally, privately. This was given to these men even

before the Holy Spirit had come and formed the church. It is a direct command for you and for me today. It is our business to get the Word of God out to the world. We can't say that it is up to the church to send missionaries and to give out the gospel, and then sit back and let others do it. The all-important question is whether you are getting out the Word of God. Have you gone to the ends of the earth as a witness to the gospel? Or do you support a missionary or a radio program that does? Are you personally involved? Today there are a great many people who want to talk about the times and seasons of His coming, but they don't want to get involved in getting out the Word of God. But that is His commission -- not only to the apostles -- that is His commission to you and me. I am of the opinion that if the Lord should suddenly appear to you or to me right where we are at this moment, He would not talk about the time of His coming, but He would talk about getting out the gospel. He wants people to be saved. This is our commission.

In order to get this gospel out, we need power. That was His promise: "Ye shall receive power." And we need the leading of the Lord. Although it is our business today to get out the Word of God, there is no power in us, there is no power in the church, but there is power in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who moves through an individual or through the church or through a radio program. The question is whether we permit Him to do so. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me." Our witness is to Christ. He is the center of attraction. "In Jerusalem," which applied to us means our hometown, there should be a witness to Christ. "All Judaea" is equivalent to our community; "Samaria" represents the other side of the tracks, the folk we don't associate with. Although we may not meet with these people socially, we are to take the gospel to them. Of course we can't associate with everybody. We can select our friends as everyone else does. That is part of the freedom which we have. There are folk who wouldn't want to associate with us. There are lots of folk who wouldn't want me around; I would crimp their style. But we have both the privilege and the responsibility to get the Word of God out to folk whether or not we associate with them socially.

Finally, this witness to Christ is to go to the uttermost part of the earth. We never should lose sight of the fact that this is the Lord's intention. He has told us if we love Him to keep His commandments. His command is personal. We can't pass this off on the crowd, and say "The church is doing it; so I don't need to get involved." How much are you involved, friend? What is your witness to Christ?

Ascension And Promise Of The Return Of Jesus (1:9-11)

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight [[Acts 1:9](#)].

The ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is an important and significant miracle in the ministry of the Lord. This is especially true for our space age when eyes are turned aloft and we are talking about travel in space. Space travel isn't really new. The Lord Jesus took off, and He didn't need a launching pad or a space suit or a missile.

There was a cloud to receive Him. What kind of a cloud was that? Was it a moisture cloud? No, this was the same shekinah glory cloud that had filled the tabernacle. In His high priestly prayer He had prayed: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own

self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" ([John 17:5](#)). When He was born into this world, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. When He left this earth, He was wrapped in glory clouds. This is the way He returned to the Father's right hand.

While the apostles are watching all this, two angels appear to them. They look like men, and they have an important message.

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven [[Acts 1:10-11](#)].

It is the glorified Jesus who went up into heaven. This same Jesus, the glorified Jesus, will return in like manner and to the same place. [Zechariah 14:4](#) tells us: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south." He took off at that place, and He will come back to that place.

Waiting For The Spirit (1:12-14)

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey [[Acts 1:12](#)].

"A sabbath day's journey," which was less than one mile, kept people pretty much in their location. That was why they would all camp very close to the temple during the feast days when they came to Jerusalem to worship. The Mount of Olives would probably be covered with people camping out, possibly several hundred thousand of them at the time of the feasts. Why? Because they needed to stay within a Sabbath day's journey of the temple.

And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren [[Acts 1:13-14](#)].

I rejoice that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there. Her reputation has now been cleared. At this point it was obvious that Jesus was the Son of God, and virgin born, as she had claimed.

The attitude of the apostles and the other believers was that of oneness, of prayer, and of waiting.

There is no way that we can duplicate this period today. Remember that this is in a time period, a time capsule, between His ascension into heaven and the coming of the Holy

Spirit. You and I do not live in that time period. It cannot be duplicated. We are not waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit; He came over nineteen hundred years ago.

Appointment Of An Apostle (1:15-26)

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out [[Acts 1:15-18](#)].

Here is Simon Peter speaking up again. Note that this is before the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. This man needs the filling of the Holy Spirit -- and so do you and I.

He certainly gives a vivid picture of Judas, doesn't he?

If you are bothered by a seeming discrepancy here and with [Matthew 27:5](#), the following quotation from Unger's Bible Dictionary by Merrill F. Unger (pp. 615-616) will be helpful to you.

NOTE. -- Between these two passages ([Matt. 27:5](#); [Acts 1:16-25](#)) there appears at first sight a discrepancy. In Matthew it is stated "He cast down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself." In Acts (ch. 1) another account is given. There it is stated: (1) That instead of throwing the money into the temple he bought a field with it. (2) That instead of hanging himself, "falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." (3) That for this reason, and not because the priests had bought it with the price of blood, the field was called "Aceldama." The fact would seem to be that Judas hanged himself, probably with his girdle, which either broke or became untied, and threw him heavily forward upon the jagged rocks below, thus inflicting the wound mentioned by Peter in the Acts. The apparent discrepancy in the two accounts as to the disposition of the money may be thus explained: "It was not lawful to take into the temple treasury, for the purchase of sacred things, money that had been unlawfully gained. In such case the Jewish law provided that the money was to be restored to the donor, and, if he insisted on giving it that he should be induced to spend it for something for the public weal. By a fiction of law the money was still considered to be Judas's, and to have been applied by him in the purchase of the well-known 'potter's field' " (Edersheim, Life of Jesus, ii, 575).

And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take [[Acts 1:19-20](#)].

There is always a question about what happened here. Should Simon Peter have held this election to choose a man to take the place of Judas? I don't think so.

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection [[Acts 1:21-22](#)].

I believe that the election to choose a successor to Judas Iscariot was conducted by Peter without the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet been given. Matthias was evidently a good man. He met the requirements of an apostle, which meant he must have seen the resurrected Christ, as that was a necessary requirement.

And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles [[Acts 1:23-26](#)].

I can't see that this was the leading of the Holy Spirit, nor that it was God's leading in the casting of lots. Is Matthias actually the one who took the place of Judas? I don't think so. I believe that in His own time, the Lord Jesus Himself appointed one to take the place of Judas Iscariot. We don't hear another word about Matthias -- nothing is recorded of his ministry. I think the Holy Spirit ignored Matthias. It is my conviction that the man the Lord chose was Paul. You may ask, "Do you have an authority for that statement?" Yes. Listen to Paul as he writes to the Galatian believers: "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)" ([Gal. 1:1](#)). Paul is saying that he was chosen by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. How did He do it? Through the Holy Spirit whom He had sent into the world. The ministry of Paul certainly justifies the fact that he was the one to take Judas' place. Of course I realize that the majority of good Bible commentators disagree with me, but I am just passing on to you my own conviction.

It is remarkable, and I want to mention again how [Acts 1](#) brings the four Gospels to a focal point. Matthew concludes with the Resurrection, Mark with the Ascension, Luke with the promise of the Holy Spirit, and John with the promise of the Second Coming. [Acts 1](#) brings all four records together and mentions each of them. The four Gospels funnel into Acts, and Acts is the bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles.

Chapter 2

THEME: The Day of Pentecost

We can divide this chapter into two sections. The coming of the Holy Spirit is recorded in [verses 1-13](#). The first sermon in the church age, given by the apostle Peter, is recorded in [verses 14-47](#).

Coming Of The Holy Spirit (2:1-13)

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place [[Acts 2:1](#)].

The words fully come could be translated "fulfilled." When the Day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, they were all together in one place.

Pentecost took place fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits. You may remember in our study in Leviticus that we found that the Feast of Firstfruits speaks of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ is the firstfruits -- ". . . Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" ([1Cor. 15:23](#)).

The Passover speaks of the death of Jesus Christ, we learn from [1Corinthians 5:7](#): ". . . For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." Since the Passover has been fulfilled in the death of Christ, and the Feast of Firstfruits has been fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, we believe that the Feast of Pentecost represents something -- that is, it is the fulfillment of something. Its fulfillment is the birth of the church, the day the church came into existence.

When the Day of Pentecost "was being fulfilled," or "was fully come," means that this was the fulfillment of the meaning and the purpose for which it was given originally. On Pentecost there was to be a meal offering to the Lord, which was to be presented in two loaves of fine flour baked with leaven ([Lev. 23](#)). This was to depict the beginning and origin of the church. It spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit in the very particular ministry of calling a people out of this world to form the body of Christ, which is the church. Five minutes before the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost there was no church. Five minutes after the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost there was a church. In other words, what Bethlehem was to the birth of Christ, Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost was to the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit became incarnate. He began to baptize believers, which means that the Holy Spirit identified them with Christ as His body here on this earth. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" ([1Cor. 12:13](#)).

The Holy Spirit began to perform a ministry on the Day of Pentecost. The Day of Pentecost was fulfilled on that day. When the Day of Pentecost "was fully come" does not mean it was 12:00 noon [Ob 7:00](#) in the morning [Ob 2:00](#) in the afternoon. It means that Pentecost, which Israel had been celebrating for many generations, was fulfilled.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting [[Acts 2:2](#)].

Now I wish to call your attention to something that is very important. When the Holy Spirit came, He was not visible. However, He made His presence known in two ways. There was an appeal to two of the gates through which all mankind gets his information: the ear-gate and the eye-gate. We hear and we see. The Holy Spirit used both these gates. Through the ear-gate they heard a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. This sound filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Notice that it was not a wind; it was the sound as of a wind. It wasn't like the sound of the wind blowing through the treetops. It sounded like a tornado, and I believe that all of Jerusalem could hear it. A friend of my daughter lives in Kansas and went through the experience of a tornado. It did not destroy their home but came within two blocks of it. When she wrote about it to my daughter, she said, "The first thing we noticed was a sound like a thousand freight trains coming into town." Friend, that was a rushing, mighty wind, and that was the sound. It was that kind of sound that they heard on the Day of Pentecost.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them [[Acts 2:3](#)].

Again, I would call your attention to this. The tongues were like as of fire. It was not fire, but it looked like fire. This verse would be better translated, "There appeared unto them tongues parting asunder." That is, the tongues were like as a fire and it rested upon each of them. This was the appeal to the eye-gate. So on that Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to the church, baptizing them into the body of Christ, there was an appeal to the ear and an appeal to the eye.

This is not to be confused with the baptism of fire. The baptism of fire is judgment which is yet to come. In the Book of Revelation we see the wrath of God revealed from heaven, fire from heaven. That is a baptism of fire. If men will not have the baptism of the Holy Spirit, then they must have the baptism of fire -- judgment. The baptism of fire is for those who have rejected Jesus Christ.

I used to go to a prayer meeting which a wonderful preacher attended. I loved that dear brother, although his theology differed from mine in some points. He would always pray that fire would fall on us. And I always canceled out that prayer and said, "Lord, for goodness sake, don't let fire fall on us." Fire, you see, is judgment. Fire burns. That is yet to come. When the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, they saw something that in appearance looked like fire.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance [[Acts 2:4](#)].

This verse says they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Someone may question the fact that I have been saying they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Were they? Yes. The Lord Jesus told them they would be. "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" ([Acts 1:4-5](#)). The very fact that they were filled with the Holy Spirit indicates that all the other ministries of the Holy Spirit to believers in this age had already been performed. They occurred in this order: First, they

were regenerated. A man must be born again. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" ([John 3:5](#)). Secondly, they were indwelt by the Spirit of God. "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" ([Rom. 8:9](#)). Thirdly, they were sealed by the Holy Spirit into an eternal relationship with God. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" ([Eph. 1:13-14](#)). And again, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" ([Eph. 4:30](#)). It is possible to grieve the Spirit of God, but it is not possible to grieve Him away. He seals the believer unto the day of redemption. We are never told to ask for the sealing of the Holy Spirit. It is something which God does "after that ye believed," which is better translated "having believed." Faith in Jesus Christ gives us the sealing of the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption.

Fourthly, they were baptized of the Holy Spirit. This was foretold by John the Baptist ([Luke 3:16](#)) and repeated by the Lord Jesus: "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" ([Acts 1:5](#)). The baptism took place, which placed them in the body of believers. It marked the beginning of the church. Ever since that day every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is placed into the body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" ([1Cor. 12:13](#)).

Now when the filling of the Holy Spirit took place on the Day of Pentecost, it indicated that the other four ministries of the Holy Spirit had been accomplished. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." The filling of the Spirit was for service. The experience of the Day of Pentecost came from the filling of the Holy Spirit (not the baptism of the Holy Spirit). It is still the same today. The filling of the Holy Spirit is for service. This is the only work of the Holy Spirit that we are to do anything about -- we are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" ([Eph. 5:18](#)). Notice that before Pentecost the believers wanted this filling of the Spirit. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication . . ." ([Acts 1:14](#)). What would their supplication be about? About the promise of the Lord Jesus that He would send His Holy Spirit to them.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a command given to us. It is not an experience. It is an act of God whereby the believer in Jesus Christ is indwelt by the Spirit of God, sealed unto the day of redemption, and placed into the church, the body of Christ, by the baptism of the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit of God is the enablement for service. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit.

After they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" ([v. 4](#)). These "other tongues" are not unknown tongues. There were many tongues spoken by Jews throughout the Roman Empire. These worshipers had come from the different areas of the Roman Empire for the Feast of Pentecost. Remember that all male Jews were required to come to Jerusalem for three of

the feasts. They were in Jerusalem because of that, and many of them couldn't speak Hebrew.

That is not unusual. There are many Jews in our country today who cannot speak Hebrew. For years it was a dead language. In Israel today, Hebrew is being spoken again.

Now, my friend, the Day of Pentecost cannot be duplicated. It was a precise point in history. We cannot duplicate it any more than we can duplicate Bethlehem and the birth of Christ at Christmas.

Suppose the wise men had come back to Jerusalem again the next year and had said, "Say, we're looking for the King of the Jews who is born in Bethlehem." Suppose Herod would have said, "Weren't you fellows here last year?" "Yes." "Well, did you find Him?" "Yes." "Well, if He was born in Bethlehem last year, He isn't born there again this year." "Oh, but we had such a wonderful experience here last year, we thought we'd come back and do it all over again." Of course, Herod would have answered, "Look, fellows, you can't duplicate that. He was born in Bethlehem only once."

Just so, friend, you cannot duplicate Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. You don't have to beg Him to come or urge Him to come. He is here. The Spirit of God is in the world today. Jesus told us what He would do after He came: "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" ([John 16:14](#)). We know He is here when He takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. And when we are talking about the things of Christ, the Spirit of God has something that He can work with.

"As the Spirit gave them utterance." These apostles were from Galilee. They couldn't speak all these other languages. But they are speaking them now. The Spirit gave them utterance.

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven [[Acts 2:5](#)].

They had come from everywhere because of the Feast of Pentecost. This was their reason for being in Jerusalem.

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language [[Acts 2:6](#)].

A better translation of "when this was noised abroad" is "when this sound having taken place." Because of the sound as of a mighty rushing wind, a multitude came together. I shall never forget here in Pasadena, where I live, the first time we heard a jet plane break the sound barrier. We were all out in our front yards wanting to know where the sound had come from. We had never heard anything like it before. The sound the people of Jerusalem heard had never been heard before; so they came rushing toward it -- which may have been to the temple area. Probably all 120 believers were there ([Acts 1:15](#)).

The people who rushed there were confounded because every man heard -- in the Greek the imperfect tense is used, so that it should read, "every man was hearing" -- them speak

in his own dialect. It was not only that the language of their country was spoken, but each man heard his own dialect as it was spoken in his area of the country.

These men were not talking gibberish. They were not talking in unknown tongues. These men were speaking the dialects of the people in the multitude.

Now there is another aspect which I must mention. Some Bible scholars believe that what is meant here is that the apostles were not speaking in other languages at all, but were speaking in their own Galilean dialect, and the miracle was in the hearing because it says that every man heard them speak in his own dialect. Was the miracle that broke down the language barrier in the speaking or in the hearing?

And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another,
Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were
born?

Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in
Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about
Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the
wonderful works of God [[Acts 2:7-11](#)].

Here were people from three continents. Certainly they were of diverse languages and dialects. They each heard these Galileans speak in an understandable dialect. May I say, these were not unknown tongues. They were languages that were understood.

And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to
another, What meaneth this? [[Acts 2:12](#)].

They were amazed -- perplexed would be a better word. They didn't understand what was taking place.

Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine [[Acts 2:13](#)].

The literal translation is sweet wine, and I understand that is a little more intoxicating. They thought these men were drunk.

Remember that Paul writes: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" ([Eph. 5:18](#)). Have you noticed that a drunk man seems to have more power? He certainly is more talkative. Perhaps many of us today need the filling of the Spirit to make us talkative -- not to speak in an unknown tongue, but power to speak the gospel to others. That is the kind of tongues movement we need today. And by the way, we need a tongues movement of giving the gospel in the language that the man can understand. That is all important.

What a day Pentecost was! It was the day the Holy Spirit came to call out a body of believers to form the church. The day before Pentecost there was no church. The day after Pentecost there was a church. Just as the Feast of Pentecost in the Old Testament

followed fifty days after the Feast of the Firstfruits, so fifty days after the Lord Jesus arose from the dead the Holy Spirit came to call out a body of believers.

Now Simon Peter is going to stand up and answer the mocking taunt that they are full of new wine.

First Sermon In The Church Age, Delivered By Peter (2:14-41)

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day [[Acts 2:14-15](#)].

Now I think that we need to recognize who the congregation was. These were men of Judea and all that dwell at Jerusalem. In that day Jerusalem was entirely a Jewish city. Pilate and his people had their headquarters in Caesarea, not in Jerusalem. This early church was 100 percent Jewish. It was made up of Israelites. We need to recognize that. The church began in Jerusalem, then moved out to Judea, then Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. This has been the movement of the church from that day to this. In the Old Testament it was to Jerusalem that the world was to come for worship. Now they are commanded to leave Jerusalem and to take this message to the ends of the earth.

Peter replies to their mockery and ridicule by saying, "This could not be drunkenness, because look at the time of day it is!" This was not an hour when people in that day were drunk. He is talking to the cynic.

Now Peter quotes to them from their own Scripture.

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [[Acts 2:16](#)].

He uses this prophecy as an answer to the cynical, the unbeliever, the mocker. This is his purpose for quoting it. He says, "That is that," which is, this is similar to or this is like that. He does not say that this is the fulfillment of that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. He is saying, "Why do you think this is something odd or something strange? We have prophecy that says these things are going to come to pass." Peter goes on to quote the prophecy from Joel. I'm glad Simon Peter quoted as much as he did because he makes it obvious that he was not attempting to say this was fulfilled. Now what is it that is to come?

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood,
before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of
the Lord shall be saved [[Acts 2:17-21](#)].

I don't think that anyone would claim that on the Day of Pentecost the moon was turned to blood or that the sun was turned to darkness. When Christ was crucified, there was darkness for three hours, but not on the Day of Pentecost. Nor were there wonders of heaven above and signs in the earth beneath. Nor was there blood and fire and a vapor of smoke. Simon Peter quotes this passage to these mockers to show them that the pouring out of the Spirit of God should not be strange to them. Joel had predicted it, and it is going to come to pass.

My friend, [Joel 2:28-32](#) has not been fulfilled to this day. If we turn back to the Book of Joel, we will find that he had a great deal to say about the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will begin with the Great Tribulation period. It will go on through the Millennium. In three chapters of the Book of Joel the Day of the Lord is mentioned five times. Joel talks about the fact that it is a time of war, a time of judgment upon the earth. That has not yet been fulfilled. It was not fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

If we could only see that all Simon Peter is saying in his introduction is, "Now look, this is not strange or contrary. The day is coming when this will be fulfilled. And today we are seeing something similar to it." Now after his introduction, he will move on to his text. Remember he is speaking to men who knew the Old Testament. Don't try to read nineteen hundred years of church history into this. This is just the beginning of the church on the Day of Pentecost. This is the inception of the church. Obviously he is speaking to the Jews -- "Ye men of Israel." He doesn't say, "Ye men of Southern California." He is talking to Israelites. Now he is getting down to the nitty gritty. Now he is getting to his subject.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man
approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs,
which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also
know [[Acts 2:22](#)].

Now I personally think that miracles and wonders and signs were all different. I believe that miracles were performed for one purpose, wonders for another purpose, and signs for another purpose. Jesus did certain things that were to be signs. Some miracles of healing were performed to get the attention of His hearers. These were the three areas in which our Lord moved.

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and
foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have
crucified and slain:

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death:
because it was not possible that he should be holden of it [[Acts 2:23-24](#)].

Peter is saying that what has happened was not contrary to God's program. This is not something that took God by surprise. However, he makes it clear that this does not release men from their responsibility. Who is responsible for the crucifixion of Christ? The religious rulers were the ones who began the movement. I would say that they were largely to blame. They moved upon the multitude so that they produced mob action. They also maneuvered the Roman government to execute Him. Remember, friend, He was crucified on a Roman cross. Peter is pointing his finger at his fellow Israelites.

But there is no use in our arguing about who was responsible for His death back at that time. I'll tell you who is responsible for His death. You are responsible, and I am responsible. It was for my sins and for your sins that He died. Listen to the words of Jesus: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" ([John 10:17-18](#)).

Peter is speaking to men who were directly involved in the plot of the Crucifixion, and he says, "Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

However, that is not the most important part of his message. He goes on, "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death." He preaches the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the first sermon ever preached in the church age. This is the beginning. This is the Day of Pentecost. What is his theme? It is not the prophecy of Joel, my friend. It is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's not try to change his subject! Now he is going to quote his text. He quotes from [Psalm 16:8-10](#). I am glad he did that because this helps me to understand [Psalm 16](#).

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always
before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be
moved:

Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover
also my flesh shall rest in hope:

Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer
thine Holy One to see corruption [[Acts 2:25-27](#)].

The word hell should be "sheol." In that day it was sheol.

Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me
full of joy with thy countenance [[Acts 2:28](#)].

In [Psalm 16](#) David is talking about the resurrection of Christ. This has now been fulfilled. The interpretation of this psalm is given by Simon Peter, who is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch
David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us
unto this day [[Acts 2:29](#)].

Apparently Peter was standing in the temple area. He could point his finger to the sepulchre of David. I have stood in that temple area, and I could point my finger up to the

top of Mount Zion where David is buried. He is saying, "It is obvious that David wasn't speaking about himself because his bones are right up there on the top of the hill. His grave is there; his body did undergo corruption. He is not speaking of himself but of Someone whom you and I know, Someone who did not see corruption but was raised from the dead."

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption [[Acts 2:30-31](#)].

This is what David was talking about in [Psalm 16](#). He was speaking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You may say, "But I read [Psalm 16](#), and it doesn't say that Jesus Christ will rise from the dead." My friend, here in [Acts 2](#) we have the Holy Spirit's interpretation of this psalm. Now we can go back and read the psalm, knowing that it refers to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

What is Simon Peter talking about? His sermon is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first sermon ever preached in the church age was an Easter sermon. And every sermon in the early church was an Easter sermon.

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses [[Acts 2:32](#)].

Now Peter is saying to the crowd there that day, "This that you have seen -- that is, the miracle of hearing their own languages spoken by Galileans -- has taken place because Jesus was raised from the dead."

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

Until I make thy foes thy footstool [[Acts 2:33-35](#)].

Old Testament saints didn't go to heaven. If any of them had been up in heaven, David would have been there. David did not ascend into heaven. You see, the Old Testament saints are going to be raised to live down on this earth someday. It is the church that will be taken to the New Jerusalem. It is said of the believers today when they die that they are absent from the body and present with the Lord ([2Cor. 5:8](#)).

Now he quotes [Psalm 110:1](#). He is showing them that Jesus is up yonder at the right hand of God. He will be there until He comes back to establish His Kingdom. But while He is at the right hand of God, He is still working in the world.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ [[Acts 2:36](#)].

He is preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ -- that Christ died for their sins, but He rose again.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? [[Acts 2:37](#)].

The message of Simon Peter brought conviction to them.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [[Acts 2:38](#)].

This is for a people who had the Word of God, who had heard the message, who knew the prophecies. They had been going along in one direction, which was away from God, even though they had a God-given religion. They are told to repent. They are to turn around and come God's way.

Peter says to them, "Repent, and be baptized." Water baptism would be the evidence that they had repented, that they had come to Christ and had put their trust in Him.

Peter says to them, "Be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. This will be an evidence that you have trusted Him for the remission of your sins -- rather than bringing a sacrifice to be offered in the temple." You see, their baptism would be a testimony to the fact that Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

"And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Anyone who believes, who puts his trust in Jesus Christ, will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call [[Acts 2:39](#)].

Nineteen hundred years ago you and I were "afar off." He is talking about us here.

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation [[Acts 2:40](#)].

In other words, "Get away from this religion. Turn to Christ."

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls [[Acts 2:41](#)].

This is not some preacher's count. These were genuinely born again believers. Here is one place where the figure on the number of converts is absolutely accurate.

The Church Which Has Come Into Existence (2:42-47)

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers [[Acts 2:42](#)].

I have a little booklet called the Spiritual Fingerprints of the Visible Church. How can you identify a real church? Notice the four marks of identification. First, They continued

steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. The mark of a church is not the height of the steeple nor the sound of the bell. It is not whether the pulpit is stationed in the middle or the chancel is divided. The important issue is whether or not they hold to the apostles' doctrine. Correct doctrine was one of the fingerprints of the visible church. Secondly, fellowship. They were sharing the things of Christ. The third, breaking of bread. Breaking of bread is more than just going through the ritual of the Lord's Supper. It means being brought into a fellowship and a relationship with Christ. The fourth, prayers. I'm afraid in the average church today it is a little fingerprint. That is, prayer is the evident weakness of the church. Actually, the greatest asset of any church is prayer.

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles [[Acts 2:43](#)].

It was the apostles who had the sign gifts.

And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved [[Acts 2:44-47](#)].

Never has the church been as spiritually strong as it was at that time. This type of living would never work today because we have too many carnal Christians. And, notice, it was the Lord who did the adding to the church.

Chapter 3

THEME: First miracle of the church; Peter's second sermon

We are still in the first division of the Book of Acts which shows the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in Jerusalem. We have seen the birthday of the church on the Day of Pentecost, a day which can never be repeated. There was a church because the Holy Spirit had become incarnate in believers. He was indwelling the believers, and He filled them with His love, power, and blessing for service.

Just as you and I cannot repeat Bethlehem, neither can we repeat Pentecost. But we do need the power of the Holy Spirit today. Thank God, He is in the world, convicting the world, restraining evil in the world. We don't have to seek Him; He is indwelling all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this third chapter we will find the healing of the lame man, [verses 1-11](#). The appealing and revealing address of Peter is in [verses 12-26](#). The result was five thousand men who believed!

Healing Of Lame Man (3:1-11)

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour [[Acts 3:1](#)].

This apparently was the time of the evening sacrifice when a priest went in to offer incense with his prayers. We find in the first chapter of Luke that this was the service Zacharias was performing when he went to minister before the golden altar and the angel appeared to him. That golden altar, the altar of incense, speaks of prayer. This was the time of prayer. There would be a great company in the temple area praying at this time.

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple [[Acts 3:2](#)].

This man had been born lame. He was brought every day and put there at the gate of the temple. What a contrast he was to the gate which is called Beautiful. Here was a beautiful gate, and here was a man who was carried. Man can make beautiful things, but man cannot improve himself. Of course, man can do some trimming on the outside. He can cut his hair, have his fingernails manicured, take a bath now and then, but man can never change that old nature which he has. This is the contrast we have here -- a beautiful gate of the temple and a man lame from his mother's womb.

He was there to beg for alms. This was the way he lived, of course.

Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms [[Acts 3:3](#)].

This shows us that after the Day of Pentecost, Peter and John still went up to the temple to pray. All the believers there in Jerusalem were Israelites or proselytes, and they continued to go to the temple to pray. The poor beggar saw Peter and John, and he hoped that they would be able to give him something.

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them [[Acts 3:4-5](#)].

When these two men gave him this much attention, the beggar looked at them with the certainty that they would give him something.

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk [[Acts 3:6](#)].

An incident is told of one of the early saints of the church in Rome who walked in on the pope as he was counting money. Realizing that he had walked in on something which was private, he started to walk out. The pope said to him, "No longer can the church say 'Silver and gold have I none.' " As the saintly man continued walking out, he said, "Neither can the church say to the impotent man, 'Rise up and walk.' "

Today the organized church has wealth. I suppose that if one could put together all the holdings of all the churches, all groups, denominations, and non-denominations across

the country, we would find the church wealthier than any other organization. I think it is wealthier than the Standard Oil Company. Yet the church today lacks power.

Now notice what Peter does.

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength [[Acts 3:7](#)].

Remember that Dr. Luke wrote this book. You will notice that when Dr. Luke records a miracle, he gives a great many details which we don't find in some other books. He tells specifically what happened. The weakness had been in the feet and ankle bones of this man.

And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God [[Acts 3:8](#)].

Friend, don't miss this word leaping. It occurs twice in this verse.

This is a very interesting chapter. We will find that Peter is going to offer the Kingdom to the nation again because at this time the church is 100 percent Israelite. There are no Gentiles from the outside. The church began with the Jews in Jerusalem. Later, it will go to the ends of the earth. But this, now, is the Jerusalem period.

Don't try to tell me this is another dispensation. We have hyperdispensationalists today who call this another dispensation. It is not different at all. But it is a period of transition. The Lord had said they were to begin by going out to the ends of the earth.

Now the Kingdom is being offered to Israel again. This will be the final opportunity. What will be some of the identifying marks of the Kingdom? Well, one is that the lame shall leap! "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" ([Isa. 35:6](#)).

Every instructed Israelite going up to the temple that day marveled at this lame man leaping. They knew this could actually be the beginning of the Kingdom. The Messiah had been crucified, raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, and seated at God's right hand. If they would receive Him, He would come again.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God:

And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him [[Acts 3:9-10](#)].

They saw him. They recognized the man. They caught the significance of this miracle. I'm afraid there are a great many today who haven't caught the significance of this record which Dr. Luke has given us.

And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering [[Acts 3:11](#)].

Is this to be the beginning of the Kingdom? Great things had happened in Jerusalem during the past few weeks. They had witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, His resurrection, His ascension, and the Day of Pentecost. They are amazed. What is really taking place?

The Appealing And Revealing Address Of Peter (3:12-26)

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? [[Acts 3:12](#)].

He doesn't say, "Ye men of the United States." He is talking to the men of Israel. This is the Jerusalem period, friend. This is the transition period. The church has not yet moved out to other areas. No one in Rome has heard yet. No one in America has heard. No one in England has heard. This is in Jerusalem.

May I say something kindly? Folk reading the Bible should bring to it the same common sense they use in reading other books. This is God's Book. But it is not some "way out yonder" type of book. It deals with us right where we are, and it communicates so we can understand it.

Peter is very careful to tell them that this miracle was not done in his own power. He is going to direct this Jewish audience back to the Old Testament. He is going to tell them that if they will turn to God, these prophecies can be fulfilled.

Listen to some of the prophecies which these Jewish people knew. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" ([Zech. 12:10](#)). This would be fulfilled if they would turn to Him. It was not fulfilled because the nation did not accept the Lord Jesus at that time. They did not repent and turn to Him. Peter will invite them to turn to the Lord Jesus. They will refuse. The time is still to come when this will be fulfilled. Also Ezekiel spoke of the Kingdom: "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God" ([Ezek. 36:27-28](#)). Notice the twelfth chapter of Isaiah, a remarkable chapter -- only six verses -- that speaks of the worship during the time of the Kingdom: "And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation" ([Isa. 12:1-2](#)). Also, as we have mentioned, [Isaiah 35:6](#) told of the lame man leaping as an hart. "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" ([Isa. 35:10](#)). They should have seen that this lame man was a miniature, a picture of the whole nation. If they would but turn to God, all these promises would be fulfilled.

The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and

denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses [[Acts 3:13-15](#)].

Here he goes again. Simon Peter will never preach a sermon without the mention of the Resurrection. Paul won't either. Unfortunately, today there are many sermons preached without a mention of the Resurrection.

And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all [[Acts 3:16](#)].

In essence Peter is saying, "Don't you see that man leaping there? That is what they will do in the Kingdom. The question is whether or not you want the Messiah to come back. Do you want to receive Him?"

And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled [[Acts 3:17-18](#)].

Their past deeds call for a course of action. That action is repentance and conversion. This was not a new message to them. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" ([Isa. 43:25](#)). Listen to Peter's message:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you [[Acts 3:19-20](#)].

If they had accepted Jesus, would He have returned to the earth? The answer, of course, is yes. Peter says He would have. Then what would have been God's program after that? I'll tell you something today that will be a secret just between you and me: I don't know what would have happened. Does that come as a surprise to you? Well, I have news for you. No one else knows either -- no one except God. We can ask innumerable "if" questions to which there are no answers. All I know is that the nation did not accept Jesus Christ. That is the only answer I know to the "if" question. Any other answer would be only the wildest speculation.

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began [[Acts 3:20-21](#)].

Some folk use this verse to bolster their belief that eventually everything and every person will be saved. "The restitution of all things" is the phrase they use. Exactly what are the "all things" which are to be the subject of restitution? In [Philippians 3:8](#) when Paul said, ". . . I count all things but loss . . ." did he mean all things in God's universe? Obviously not. So here, the "all things" are limited by what follows. "The times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." The prophets had spoken of the restoration of Israel. Nowhere is there a prophecy of the conversion and restoration of the wicked dead.

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people [[Acts 3:22-23](#)].

The nation of Israel was on the verge of a great judgment. In B.C. 70 Titus, the Roman general, came with his army and destroyed the city. It is estimated that over a million people perished, and the rest were sold into slavery throughout the Roman Empire. Judgment did come upon these people.

Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities [[Acts 3:24-26](#)].

This is a transition period. They were given their final chance to accept the Messiah. Because they turned down their opportunity to accept the Messiah, later on Paul will come on the scene as the apostle to the Gentiles. What might have happened if they had turned to God is merely speculation. They did not turn to Him. God is never surprised by what man does, and He still works things out according to His plan and purpose.

Chapter 4

THEME: First persecution of the church; power of the Holy Spirit

This chapter shows the result of Peter's second sermon. Five thousand people were saved. Then the apostles were arrested and put into prison. This was at the instigation of the Sadducees, and the reason for it was the preaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First Persecution Of The Church (4:1-22)

And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead [[Acts 4:1-2](#)].

I want to call your attention to something that is quite startling and interesting to see. Who was it that led in the persecution of the Lord Jesus and finally had Him arrested and put to death? It was the religious rulers, the Pharisees. They were the enemies of Christ as He walked here on earth. Apparently quite a few of the Pharisees were saved. We know that Nicodemus was. Joseph of Arimathea may have been a Pharisee. We know that Saul of Tarsus was one. Apparently there were many others of the Pharisees who were brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. After they had gotten rid of Him, their enmity and their spite were over.

Now the Sadducees, who do not believe in resurrection, become the great enemies when the church comes into existence because the apostles are preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an illustration of this. I have never engaged in any movement or reformation to try to straighten up any of the places where I preached. I never felt that was my job. I was a pastor in downtown Los Angeles for many years. In that town we had movie stars who had their day, but then the stardom disappeared and they became burned-out cinders. Often they would go into some kind of reformation work after their star had gone out. Maybe that was some type of reaction, I don't know. Such a woman called and asked me to serve on a committee that was trying to clean up downtown Los Angeles. I agreed it needed cleaning up, but I told her that I could not serve on the committee. She was amazed. "Aren't you a minister?" she asked. "Aren't you interested in cleaning up Los Angeles?" I answered, "I will not serve on your committee because I don't think you are going about it in the right way." Then I told her what the late Dr. Bob Shuler had told me years ago. He said, "We are called to fish in the fish pond, not to clean up the fish pond." This old world is a place to fish. Jesus said He would make us fishers of men, and the world is the place to fish. We are not called upon to clean up the fish pond. We need to catch the fish and get the fish cleaned up.

I have found that the biggest enemies of the preaching of the gospel are not the liquor folk. The gangsters have never bothered me. Do you know where I had my trouble as a preacher? It was with the so-called religious leaders, the liberals, those who claimed to be born again. They actually became enemies of the preaching of the gospel. It was amazing to me to find out how many of them wanted to destroy my radio ministry. They were our worst antagonists. It was not the gangsters, not the unsaved folk, but these religious leaders. They are the Sadducees of today. They are the ones who deny the supernatural. They deny the Word of God either by their lips or by their lives. That is important to see.

The Sadducees of that day and the "Sadducees" of our day try to make trouble for anyone who preaches the Resurrection. You can preach Jesus, friend. You can make Him a nice, sweet individual, a sort of Casper Milquetoast, and you will not be in trouble. But you are in trouble if you preach Him as the mighty Savior who came down to this earth, denounced sin, died on the Cross for the sins of men, and then rose again in mighty

power. That is the hated message. When the apostles preached it, the Sadducees arrested them and brought them in to the Sanhedrin.

And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand [[Acts 4:3-4](#)].

All this was happening at Solomon's porch following the sermon which Peter had delivered. If there were five thousand men who believed, how many women and children do you suppose might have believed? This was a whole multitude that turned to Christ.

I have always been reluctant to criticize Simon Peter. You can't help but love the man. He was mightily used of God. This is not an evangelistic meeting where figures are turned in rather carelessly. These are genuine converts. There is nothing like this on record from that day to the present day, and I don't believe it will be exceeded as long as the church is in the world.

And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem [[Acts 4:5-6](#)].

We have met this crowd before. These are the sneaky fellows, Annas and Caiaphas, in the background. These are the two men who condemned Jesus to die.

And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? [[Acts 4:7](#)].

Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin. The lame man had been healed, and Peter had preached his second sermon. The Sanhedrin demands to know by what power and by what name they do these things.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel [[Acts 4:8](#)].

Notice that Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit. He wasn't baptized by the Holy Spirit at this time -- that had already been accomplished. However he was filled with the Holy Spirit. You and I also need the filling of the Holy Spirit. That is something we should seek after; it is something we should devoutly want. Don't tarry and wait for the baptism of the Spirit. They had to tarry and wait until the Day of Pentecost when they were all baptized into one body, but today if you will turn to Jesus Christ, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and placed into the body of believers at the very moment you are regenerated.

If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God

raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole [[Acts 4:9-10](#)].

Peter does a good job of speaking to these men. Up to this time, every time Peter opened his mouth, he put his foot in it. But this time, I tell you, he has his "... feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" ([Eph. 6:15](#)). He is filled with the Holy Spirit, and he is saying the right thing: "Are we on trial for the good deed we did for the sick man?" That is a searching question!

This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner [[Acts 4:11](#)].

Peter goes on to point out two things about the Lord Jesus. The first is that He was crucified and raised from the dead. The other is that Jesus Christ is the stone. Jesus had said, "... Upon this rock I will build my church ..." ([Matt. 16:18](#)). What is the rock? The rock is Christ. Now Peter says, "This is the stone." What is the stone? Is it the church, or is it Simon Peter? No, it is the Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He has become the Head of the corner. This has been accomplished by the Resurrection. Notice that the Resurrection is central to the preaching of the gospel.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved [[Acts 4:12](#)].

Go back to the birth of Jesus and the instruction of the angel: "... thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" ([Matt. 1:21](#)). He is the Savior. That was His name at the beginning. When you accept the name, you accept all that it implies in the person who is involved. Peter makes it clear, and I want to emphasize that when you come to Him, my friend, you come to Him for salvation. There is no other name under heaven that can save you. The law can't save you. Religion can't save you. A ceremony can't save you. One alone, the name of Jesus, can save you. Jesus is the name of that Person who came down to this earth to save His people from their sins. When any person comes to Him in faith, that person is saved. There is no other place to turn for salvation.

Isn't it interesting that in the long history of this world and all the religions of the world and all the dogmatism that these religions have, not one of them can offer a sure salvation? An uncle of mine was a preacher in a certain church which believes in baptismal regeneration; that is, you must be baptized to be saved. I asked him this question, "Look, if I get baptized as you say, will that guarantee my salvation?" "No," he said, "it couldn't quite do that." My friend, may I say something to you today? There is none other name under heaven whereby you can be saved. If you come to Him, if you trust Christ, then you are saved. That guarantees your salvation.

That was a great message of Simon Peter's, and this is a fine note to conclude that message to the Sanhedrin.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus [[Acts 4:13](#)].

"Unlearned and ignorant" -- that is, these men hadn't been to a theological seminary. But the Sanhedrin noted that they had been with Jesus. How wonderful to have a life that somehow or other calls attention to Jesus!

And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves [[Acts 4:14-15](#)].

Were they moved by Peter's speech? No, they were not moved at all.

Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it [[Acts 4:16](#)].

Not even the Sadducees of that day could deny that a miracle had been performed. It takes a liberal, living in the twentieth century and removed by several thousand miles, to deny miracles. If you had been there then, you would have had difficulty denying the miracle. The liberals of that day had to say, "We cannot deny a miracle has taken place."

People today say that if they could only see a miracle, they would believe. That is not true. This crowd wouldn't believe, and you have the same human nature as these people had. The problem is not a problem of the mind. It is a problem of the will and of the heart. It is the heart that is desperately wicked. Unbelief is not from a lack of facts; it is the condition of the human heart.

Now they are plotting.

But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus [[Acts 4:17-18](#)].

Peter and John have an answer for them.

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed [[Acts 4:19-22](#)].

You would think that the men of the Sanhedrin would have been softened by this. They were not. They were hard as nails. Their hearts were hard.

The Power Of The Holy Spirit (4:23-37)

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is [[Acts 4:23-24](#)].

Peter and John have been released and have returned to the church, and they give their report. Here we have recorded a great meeting of the early church. I do not believe the spiritual condition of the church has ever again been on such a high level. We find the key to this in their prayer. It is more than a prayer; it is a song of praise.

"Lord, Thou art God. Lord, You are the Creator." Friend, I am afraid the church is not sure of that today. The Lord is God. Are you sure that the Lord Jesus is God? Are you? That is most important.

The church is not sure today. The church is fumbling; it has lost its power. The church is always talking of methods, always trying this gimmick and that gimmick to attract people. The church in suburbia and the church in downtown are little more than religious clubs. The church is not a powerhouse anymore.

The early church was sure that Jesus is God. They refer to the second psalm:

Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ [[Acts 4:25-26](#)].

The beginning of the fulfillment of [Psalm 2](#) was when they crucified Jesus Christ. The hatred of Jesus and of God has been snowballing down through the centuries for nineteen hundred years. It is gathering size and momentum. It will finally break into a mighty crescendo upon this earth in the final rebellion of man against God.

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word [[Acts 4:27-29](#)].

I am moved by this. This was a great prayer and praise service. They all were in one accord. Probably they did not all pray at one time, but they were certainly saying "amen" with the one who led in prayer. Notice that they did not pray for the persecution to cease. They prayed for the courage to endure it! They asked for power and for boldness to speak. That early church was something different, friend, from the church of our day.

By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus [[Acts 4:30](#)].

Note the power of the early church.

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness [[Acts 4:31](#)].

It was the condition of the church which made this possible.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common [[Acts 4:32](#)].

This did not last very long. Carnality came into the church very soon.

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all [[Acts 4:33](#)].

That is the heart of gospel preaching.

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet [[Acts 4:34-37](#)].

This kind of living could be carried out for a short while because of the spiritual condition of the church. It is nonsense to say that we should put this into effect today. If we tried it, we would have utter chaos. Why? Because there must first be the same high spiritual level, and we don't have that today. Let us be honest and face up to it. We need to come into a closer relationship to the person of Jesus Christ.

We have been introduced to Barnabas. We will hear more of him later.

Chapter 5

THEME; Death of Ananias and Sapphira; second persecution

As we come to chapter 5, we are continuing to see the effects of the great sermon that Simon Peter gave. Also we are introduced to the first defection in the church, followed by the death of Ananias and Sapphira -- who were Christians, but were not living on the high spiritual level of the early church.

At the end of chapter 4 we were introduced to a man by the name of Barnabas. He will be before us again. He was one of the wonderful saints in the early church, a true man of

God. He was the first missionary partner of the apostle Paul when they went into the difficult Galatian area, and yet God marvelously blessed their ministry there.

Barnabas had given quite a sum of money to the church. He had made a generous contribution, and everyone was talking about it. I imagine he received a great deal of publicity for his generosity. Remember that in the early church they had all things common. It reveals the fact that they were on a high spiritual level to be able to do this.

Now the first defection comes in. Having all things common could not continue and did not continue simply because of the carnal nature that is in mankind.

Death Of Ananias And Sapphira (5:1-16)

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession [[Acts 5:1](#)].

It is obvious that they were imitating Barnabas. They saw that he got a certain amount of publicity, and they thought it would be nice if they could get that kind of publicity too. They wanted it.

I have found that there are people who will give in order to be noticed. I recall a meeting with businessmen in Pasadena when I was a pastor there. We were planning to start a youth organization, and we were asking these men to give donations for the founding of this movement. It was decided that donations would not be made public.

I was informed that one of these men would contribute very little if he were not given the opportunity to speak out publicly to let everybody know how much he was giving. It is quite interesting that he contributed a small amount. After the meeting he confided in one of the men that he had intended to give about ten times that amount, but he had expected to be able to stand up or at least raise his hand to indicate how much he had given. You see, pride is still in human nature today. That was the condition of Ananias and Sapphira.

And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet [[Acts 5:2](#)].

There was nothing wrong with the fact that they kept back part of the money. They had a right to do that. The property had been theirs and they had the right to do with the money whatever they wished.

Today, we in the church are under grace. We are not constrained to give any certain amount. Someone may say we ought to give a tithe. In the early church they were giving everything they owned. Ananias and Sapphira did not give all but kept back part of it, which they had a right to do. Their problem, their sin, was that they lied about it. They said they were giving all when actually they were keeping part of it for themselves.

I don't like to have people sing the song that talks about putting "my all" on the altar. Unfortunately, that makes liars out of the people who are singing. We need to be very careful about the songs we sing. A vow to the Lord should never be made lightly.

Ananias and Sapphira said they were laying all on the altar, but they were lying about it.

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? [[Acts 5:3](#)].

The sin of this man and his wife was that they lied about it.

Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God [[Acts 5:4](#)].

There are people today who deny that the Holy Spirit is God. You will notice that Simon Peter believed He was God. First he says, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Then he says, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." The Holy Spirit is God.

And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things [[Acts 5:5](#)].

There are those today who think that Simon Peter caused the death of this man, Ananias. They even blame him for his death. I want to absolve him of this crime. Simon Peter was probably as much surprised as anyone when Ananias fell down dead. I don't think that he knew at all what was going to happen. Do you know who struck Ananias dead? God did. Do you feel that you want to bring charges against God? Do you want to call the FBI to tell them that God is guilty of murder? May I say to you, if you can give life, you have the right to take it away. This is God's universe. We are God's creatures. We breathe His air. We use bodies that He has given to us. My friend, He can take our bodies any time He wishes to. God is not guilty of a crime. This is His discipline within the church. God is the One who is responsible for the death of Ananias and Sapphira.

And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out [[Acts 5:6-9](#)].

Simon Peter knows what will happen to her. He did not know what was going to happen to Ananias, but now it is quite obvious what will happen to this woman.

Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things [[Acts 5:10-11](#)].

There are two things that amaze me about this incident. One is the fact that a lie, such as these two were living, could not exist in the early church. There was a holiness of life in the church. Ananias and Sapphira, although they were saved, lied to the Holy Spirit and were removed from the company of believers. They had committed the sin unto death. "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" ([1John 5:16](#)). This was a sin unto death which Ananias and Sapphira committed. This kind of sin could not exist in the early church.

There was defection in the church and it required discipline. However, after this experience the church would never be as pure as it was before. Up until this time they had all things in common. This incident almost ruined them. We shall see more of this in the next chapter.

Fear came upon all the church, and fear came upon people who heard of these things. Power would continue in the church, and multitudes would be saved. Yet the church would never be as pure as in those first days of existence.

The other amazing thing is the spiritual discernment of Simon Peter. This also is lacking today.

I was very much amused at a young man who came to me in a Bible class not long ago. He told me he had the gift of discerning of spirits and he could tell truth from error. Then he quoted one of the worst heretics today. I questioned him again about his gifts of discernment of spirits, of truth and error, and then asked him whether he approved of the man whom he had just quoted. "Oh yes," he said, "this man speaks the truth." I told him that I didn't believe he had any special gift -- he just thought he did.

Today the worst kind of hypocrite can get into our Bible churches. They are not good at coming to Bible studies -- I have discovered that, but they can hold offices and even run the church. If those who lied to God in our churches were to drop down dead, we would have a lot of funerals. The undertakers would be doing a land-office business.

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) [[Acts 5:12-14](#)].

Notice that the apostles exercise the apostolic gifts. Gifts of healing and gifts of miracles were sign gifts which were given to the apostles. They did many signs among the people.

The discipline in the church had put a fear on the people and had stopped the revival. Yet there were those who were still being saved. Believers were being added to the Lord. We know that by B.C. 300 there were millions of people in the Roman Empire who had turned to Christ.

Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one [[Acts 5:15-16](#)].

May I compare this to modern faith healing? Modern faith healers never heal all the people who come to them. Have you ever noticed that? The apostles had sign gifts, friend. No one in the church since then has had those gifts. People were healed, every one of them. They emptied the hospitals. This was the power of the early church.

We must remember that at that time there was no written New Testament. The church is built on Jesus Christ -- He is the Cornerstone -- and the apostles were witnesses to Christ. The sign gifts were given to them to demonstrate the fact that they spoke with God's authority. Today we have a written New Testament as our authority.

The Second Persecution (5:17-42)

We have seen that there was discipline within the early church. Now we find that there is persecution from without. When the apostles exercised their gifts, they produced a reaction.

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison [[Acts 5:17-18](#)].

Notice that the Sadducees are leading in the persecution. It was the Pharisees who had led in the persecution against Jesus; it is the Sadducees who lead the persecution against the early church. So the apostles are arrested for the second time and are put into prison.

But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said [[Acts 5:19](#)].

This translation should be "an angel" and not "the angel." In the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord was none other than the preincarnate Christ, but now Christ is the Man in glory at God's right hand, and He is the One who is directing the activity of His apostles. Today, unfortunately, much of the time His hands and His feet are paralyzed because the people in the church are not moving for Him in this world. Jesus Christ wants to move through His church. He wants to move through you and me if we will permit Him. This is not Christ who appeared here; it was an angel.

Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate

of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within [[Acts 5:20-23](#)].

This is the same sort of thing that happened at the resurrection of Christ. The stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out; He was out before the stone was rolled away. The stone was moved to let those on the outside come in. The same thing happened here. The doors did not need to be opened to let the apostles get out. They were out long before the doors were unlocked.

Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us [[Acts 5:24-28](#)].

People were listening to the apostles. They were good witnesses. They were real missionaries. Jesus had said that the gospel was to go out, first in Jerusalem. We see that this has been done -- "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine."

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men [[Acts 5:29](#)].

The apostles were obeying what their Lord and Master had told them to do. Believers are commanded to obey civil authority -- except when it comes in conflict with the commandment of God.

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree [[Acts 5:30](#)].

Jesus Christ was hanged on a tree. It was not a nice, smooth piece of timber with a crossbar, as we see it pictured today. It was a tree.

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him [[Acts 5:31-32](#)].

This is still the message to the nation Israel in Jerusalem today.

When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space [[Acts 5:33-34](#)].

Gamaliel wants the apostles excused so that he can talk to the Sanhedrin. This Gamaliel was an outstanding man and greatly respected. (He was the teacher of the apostle Paul, by the way.)

And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought [[Acts 5:35-38](#)].

He is giving sage advice.

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God [[Acts 5:39](#)].

Gamaliel gives examples of men who had started uprisings and had a following, but after they were killed, their followers disbanded. Now he advises them that the same thing will happen to Jesus and His followers.

And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go [[Acts 5:40](#)].

If these men were innocent, they should have let them go. If these men were guilty, they should have held them and punished them. Beating them and then letting them go was a sorry subterfuge. They should have listened to Gamaliel a little more carefully.

Things aren't much different today. There is that gray line between guilty and not guilty. The courts today let people off by giving them some light sentence. My friend, if a person is guilty, he should be punished. If he is not guilty, he should be let go with no sentence.

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ [[Acts 5:41-42](#)].

These apostles were marvelous men. They were rejoicing that they could suffer for the Lord Jesus. They continued to teach and to preach Jesus Christ. What is the gospel? It is a Person! It is Jesus Christ.

Do you have Him today? You either do or you don't. You either trust Him, or you do not trust Him. Either He is your Savior, or you do not have a Savior. That is the message. The apostles did not cease to teach and to preach Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6

THEME: The appointment of deacons; witness of Stephen, a deacon

In this chapter we see the further result of the defection that was in the church. We first saw that defection in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. They were believers who were saved, but they could not remain in the early church with that lie in their lives.

Now the defection we see in this chapter led to the selection of deacons. The chapter continues with the account of one of those deacons, Stephen. He was framed, arrested, and tried.

The Appointment Of Deacons (6:1-7)

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration [[Acts 6:1](#)].

We need to recognize that this took place early in the history of the church. They had attempted a form of communal living and, actually, it succeeded for a short while. Then carnality entered the church. We saw how Ananias and Sapphira misrepresented their situation. Now we find that there is a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews. This is not a clash between two races. This is not a demonstration of anti-Semitism. The word Grecians here means "Hellenists," Greek-speaking Jews. They had a background of Greek culture while the Hebrews in Jerusalem closely followed the Mosaic Law. Naturally, a misunderstanding developed.

It has been estimated that the number in the church at this time may have been around twenty-five thousand. And we see that this early church was not perfect. We hear people say, "We need to get back to the early church. The early church was power-conscious, and we today are problem-conscious." That is only a half-truth. The early church did have power, but the early church had problems also.

The high plane to which the Spirit had brought the church was interrupted by the intrusion of satanic division and confusion. The sharing of material substance, which first characterized the church, gave way to the selfishness of the old nature. Carnality had

come in. The Grecians, who evidently were a minority group, felt neglected and demanded that their widows be given equal consideration with the Hebrews. This communal form of living wasn't working as well as they would have liked. This was brought to the attention of the apostles.

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables [[Acts 6:2](#)].

The apostles felt that they should not give up the study of the Word of God. They felt it was important for them to continue with that. If they gave up the study of the Word of God and served tables, that would be the undoing of them. They should spend their time in prayer and in the study of the Word of God.

It is important for every church to recognize that the minister should have time to study the Word of God and should have time for prayer. Unfortunately, the average church today is looking for a pastor who is an organizer and a promoter, a sort of vice-president to run the church, a manager of some sort. That is unfortunate. As a result the church is suffering today. When I was a pastor in downtown Los Angeles, I had to move my study to my home. I built a special room over the garage for my study. I found out that all I had in the church was an office, not a study. They didn't intend for me to study there. They didn't want me to study there.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word [[Acts 6:3-4](#)].

The seven men were to be appointed because a crisis had arisen. The apostles felt it was important that they should not have the burden of this detail so that they could give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Now I want you to notice the qualifications of these seven men who are to assume the burden of handling the material substance of the church. I'm afraid this is something which is neglected in the average church today when the deacons are chosen. In fact, I've heard men say they didn't want to be appointed to the spiritual office of an elder but would like to be a deacon to handle the material things.

May I say to you, the office of deacon requires more spirituality and wisdom and prayer than any other office. Now notice the qualifications: These men had to be men of honest report. Their honesty was to be unquestionable. It is really a tragic thing for a church to have a deacon whose honesty is in question so that others -- including the pastor -- cannot trust him. Such a man should not be in the office of deacon. The second qualification was "full of the Holy Ghost." They were not to be filled with wine but were to be "filled with the [Holy] Spirit" ([Eph. 5:18](#)). Thirdly, they were to be men of wisdom. They were to be spiritual men who would be able to make an application of spiritual truth. That was very important. You see, the fact that they were handling material matters was apt to give

them a lopsided view of things. So it is most important that deacons should be men who look at things from the spiritual point of view.

We shall see that Stephen was a man who met these qualifications. He had wisdom -- "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" ([v. 10](#)). He had real conviction. Also he was "full of faith." Not only did he have saving faith but also serving faith -- witnessing faith. It wasn't the amount of his faith but the object of his faith that was important. We learn from this same verse that he was full of power. Such were the kind of men chosen as deacons.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word [[Acts 6:4](#)].

That was the duty of the apostles.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch [[Acts 6:5](#)].

I can't tell you anything more about the last five men. The first two, Stephen and Philip, will be mentioned again as we go along in the Book of Acts. They were outstanding men in the early church. Although they were to "serve tables," the record of them is that they were spiritual men.

Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them [[Acts 6:6](#)].

Now, friends, there is a great deal of hocus-pocus and abracadabra connected with this matter of laying on of hands. A great many people think that some spiritual power is connected to it. They think that putting on the hands communicates something to a person. Frankly, the only thing you can communicate to someone else by the laying on of hands is disease germs. You can pass them on, but you cannot pass on any kind of power.

What is the meaning of the laying on of hands? As we saw in Leviticus, when we were studying the Old Testament sacrifices, the sinner would put his hand on the head of the animal to be sacrificed, which signified that the animal to be offered was taking his place. The offering was identified with the sinner.

When the apostles put their hands on the heads of the deacons, it meant that now the deacons would be partners with them. They were together in this service. It designated that these men were set aside for this office, denoting their fellowship in the things of Christ and their position as representatives for the corporate body of believers.

Notice that this was a social service in which these men were engaged. The early church took care of its own. I think that should still be true today. The early church had a poverty program, and it included only the members of the church. The church today should also take care of its own.

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith [[Acts 6:7](#)].

It is still important in our day for the Word of God to be increasing. Certainly this is the purpose of my radio program. It is my sincere desire that the Word of God may be increased.

Don't miss the fact that many of the priests turned to the Lord. Some of them must have been serving in the temple when the veil was rent in two at the death of Christ. Many of them must have turned to Christ after that experience.

Witness Of Stephen, A Deacon (6:8-15)

Our attention is now drawn to Stephen. He is one of the great men in the early church.

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people [[Acts 6:8](#)].

Apparently these deacons are one with the apostles in having the sign gifts. They have been brought into a unique position. Because Stephen is a strong witness to the gospel, he incurs the hatred of the Sadducees. False witnesses are brought before the council to accuse Stephen.

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel [[Acts 6:9-15](#)].

Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin, and false witnesses are brought in. The false witnesses tell a half-truth, of course. The Lord Jesus did say that they would destroy this temple and He would raise it up again, but He was speaking of the temple of His body. At His trial, the false witnesses misunderstood that and misrepresented it. So here, they misunderstand Stephen when he says that the temple in Jerusalem will be left desolate. Actually, it was desolate without Christ anyway. And they twist what he is saying about the customs of Moses. Of course men are not saved by the Law but by grace. But salvation in Moses' day was by grace even as it is today. Their accusation is based on only a partial truth.

They see something marvelous in the face of Stephen. This man came closer to being an angel than any man who has ever lived.

Chapter 7

THEME: Stephen's address and martyrdom

In this chapter we find Stephen's defense before the council -- which is really not a defense. Rather it is a rehearsal of the history of the nation Israel and of their resistance and rebellion against God. He charges the council of being betrayers and murderers of Jesus. That, of course, engenders their bitterest hatred and leads to the stoning of Stephen.

In his inspired survey of the history of the nation, Stephen makes it very clear that there never was a time when the entire nation worshiped God. Yet there was always the believing remnant, a small remnant of true believers -- even as there is in our day.

Stephen's Address (7:1-53)

Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, because he dwelt in Charran [[Acts 7:1-2](#)].

They have made an accusation against him. He is questioned as to the truth of the charges. In his response he makes no attempt to clear himself. In fact, he doesn't even mention the charges they have made against him.

What a marvelous beginning. He calls them brethren. They are his brethren in the flesh. He calls the older men fathers. He is a younger man and shows them this respect. This young man is to become the first martyr in the church.

We sometimes hear it said that at the beginning Christianity was actually a youth movement. It is not altogether inaccurate to state that it was a youth movement. Two men who held as prominent a place as any were Stephen and Saul of Tarsus, whom we will meet soon. These two men had a great deal to do with the shaping of the course of the early church. Both of them were remarkable young men. Both of them were gifted and used by the Holy Spirit. Yet the only time these two young men ever met, they were enemies. The Cross divided Stephen and Saul of Tarsus just as truly as it divided the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. Paul knew what he was saying in [1Corinthians 1:18](#): "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." When Saul saw Stephen, he thought Stephen was very foolish.

This address of Stephen is a master stroke. He reviews the history of the nation beginning with Abraham. That is where the history of the nation Israel began. They did not go back any farther. You will find the same thing in the Gospel of Matthew. This book, written to the nation Israel, traces the genealogy of Jesus Christ back to Abraham. If you want to trace it all the way back to Adam, you must turn to the Gospel of Luke. Stephen starts with Abraham, a man of faith.

Even though he traces the resistance and rebellion against God by the nation, still there was always a believing remnant.

This is true today, too. In the organized church, in the visible church which you and I can see, there is a remnant of believers. Not every one in the visible church is a true believer. People may ask, "Do you think So-and-So is a Christian?" The answer is that even though he goes to church and is a church officer, he may not be a Christian. Just as in the nation Israel there was the believing remnant, so in the visible church there is the little remnant of true believers.

Abraham was a man of faith. He believed God, and he obeyed God. Faith always leads to obedience. Stephen starts his narrative with Abraham in Mesopotamia, down in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. That was the place of Abraham's hometown. It was there that God called him.

And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee [[Acts 7:3](#)].

God called Abraham away from his home because it was a home of idolatry.

Then came he out of the land of Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child [[Acts 7:4-5](#)].

He is relating the story of Abraham. This shows the faith of Abraham. God had promised him a child, and God had promised him the land. Although Abraham had neither one, he believed God.

And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.

And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs [[Acts 7:6-8](#)].

Stephen goes from Abraham to the patriarchal period. He speaks of the brethren of Joseph, motivated by envy and hatred who sold Joseph into Egypt. But God overruled and used Joseph to save them. What we have here is really the Spirit's interpretation of the Old Testament. That makes this a remarkable section.

And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem [[Acts 7:9-16](#)].

Now Stephen comes to another period in the history of these people. He is going to remind them of the deliverance out of Egypt. God made Moses the deliverer. And he shows that at first the children of Israel refused to follow Moses and that Moses had trouble with them all the way.

But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son [[Acts 7:17-21](#)].

The comment which Stephen adds confirms some of the things that we said when we were studying about Moses. If Rameses II was the pharaoh of the oppression, Moses could have been the next pharaoh. Pharaoh's daughter brought him up as her own son. This pharaoh had no sons, so Moses would have been the next in line.

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds [[Acts 7:22](#)].

Moses was brought up in the wisdom of the Egyptians. The wisdom of the Egyptians is not despised even in our advanced day when we feel that we know about everything. Too often we do not give the Egyptians full credit for what they did know. They had developed mathematics, chemistry, engineering, architecture, and astronomy to a very fine point. They had developed these fields of study in a way that was really remarkable.

Look at the pyramids. Look at the colors we find in the tombs, colors which have stood the test of the centuries. They understood about embalming. They had calculated the distance to the sun. My friend, they had a highly developed culture and were not an ignorant people.

Moses had all the advantage of that day, being raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was outstanding. Yet he was not prepared to lead God's people. All the learning of the world of that day did not equip him to lead God's people. All the wisdom that men have today is not enough for them to understand the Word of God. It is too difficult. Why? Because the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. These things are foolishness to him and he cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned (see [1Cor. 2:14](#)). Although Moses was learned in the wisdom of his day, he was not ready to deliver God's people. So, after forty years of learning in Egypt, God put him out into the desert. There God gave him his B.D. degree, his Backside of the Desert degree, and prepared him to become the deliverer.

And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not [[Acts 7:23-25](#)].

Notice that Moses did what he considered to be a very fine thing to do. He intended to deliver his brethren. But they didn't understand. Actually, neither did Moses understand. He still was not really ready, and God had to take him out to the desert to train him.

And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? [[Acts 7:26-28](#)].

Now Moses was frightened.

Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him [[Acts 7:29-31](#)].

Moses had wanted to deliver the children of Israel, but he wasn't prepared for it, and the people weren't prepared for him either. They wouldn't accept his leadership. They resisted him. Then God called him to be the deliverer.

Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt [[Acts 7:32-34](#)].

God told Moses, "I have heard their groaning." He saw their need. That was the reason He delivered them. It was for the same reason that He provided a Savior for you and me. It wasn't because we are such wonderful people. He didn't look down and say, "My, they are so lovely down there. I must go down and save them. They are so sweet, and so kind, and so loving to Me, and so faithful to Me." No! God looked down and saw nothing but corrupt, rotten sinners. We were all lost in iniquity. He loved us in spite of our unloveliness. That is the explanation.

This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush [[Acts 7:35](#)].

Notice the emphasis that has been placed upon the ministry of the angels in the life of the nation Israel. You will find the ministry of angels prominent throughout Israel's history. God gave the Law to Moses through the ministry of angels.

We hear a lot about the angels at Christmas. Whom were the angels addressing? And for what purpose? They had messages for the people of Israel -- for Mary, for Joseph, for Zacharias, and for the shepherds.

God is not sending messages through angels during this period of the church. No angels have appeared around my place. And there have been none appearing to you. If you are seeing angels, you had better make an appointment with a psychiatrist. By contrast, angels did appear and bring messages from God to members of the nation Israel.

Now Stephen goes on to describe the wilderness experience.

He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us [[Acts 7:36-38](#)].

The word church here does not mean that there was a church in the Old Testament in the same sense that there is a church in the New Testament. The word for church is ekklesia, which means "called-out." Even a group called out to mob somebody would be an ekklesia, a called-out group. So, Israel in the wilderness was a called-out group. They were called out of Egypt, by God, for a particular purpose.

To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt [[Acts 7:39](#)].

Israel did not go back to Egypt in a physical, material sense. But in their hearts they went back to Egypt many, many times. In the same way there are many people today who say they deplore certain sins of the world and sins of the flesh. It is always so easy to point the finger at someone else and condemn him for his sin. A question we need to ask ourselves is: Would I like to do the same thing? Where is our heart? Israel went back to Egypt in their heart.

Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him [[Acts 7:40](#)].

They didn't know what had happened to him, and they didn't care. They had rejected Moses.

And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands [[Acts 7:41](#)].

Stephen is showing them that Israel has always been rebellious.

Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? [[Acts 7:42](#)].

They went into idolatry. That is why Moses (and later Joshua) pleaded with the people to choose God and turn from their idols.

Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David [[Acts 7:43-45](#)].

Jesus is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Joshua.

Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob [[Acts 7:46](#)].

You see that the temple was David's idea. I have always thought it should be called David's temple even though Solomon built it.

But Solomon built him an house.

Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?

Hath not my hand made all these things? [[Acts 7:47-50](#)].

Now he comes to his condemnation of the religious rulers of that day.

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it [[Acts 7:51-53](#)].

Physically, these men were circumcised, but in their hearts and in their ears, they were uncircumcised. That is, they would not hear God any more than their ancestors down through the years had heard Him.

This is a masterful speech. Stephen reminds them of the deliverance out of Egypt. God made Moses the deliverer, but the children of Israel refused to obey him. The wilderness experience was a series of rebellions against God, brought to a climax in the making of a golden calf. A plague of idolatry broke out again in the land and resulted in the Babylonian captivity. Stephen concludes with Joshua, who led them into the land, and Jesus, who made the way to heaven. He charges that the Law was given to them supernaturally by the ministry of angels, and they did not keep it. Perhaps they knew that the birth of Jesus was announced by angels. Obviously, they have been the betrayers and murderers of Him.

Martyrdom Of Stephen (7:54-60)

Stephen became the first martyr. Also, in this portion of the chapter, we are first introduced to Saul of Tarsus.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth [[Acts 7:54](#)].

How they hated Stephen for saying what he did!

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God [[Acts 7:55](#)].

Since God is a spirit, how can there be a right hand of God? Because at "the right hand of God" indicates the place of prominence, the place of honor. God had promised Jesus Christ that He would glorify Him and give Him a name that is above every name. Jesus Christ is exalted. He is at the right hand of God. In [Hebrews 1:3](#) we are told, ". . . when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The fact that He was seated at the right hand of God indicates that His work was completed -- our redemption is finished. But that doesn't mean He isn't still working in our behalf. Here He is standing, ready to receive His first martyr.

And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul [[Acts 7:56-58](#)].

These two young men -- Stephen and Saul of Tarsus -- are together here for the first time, the only time, the last time. They are enemies. They stand on the opposite sides of the Cross.

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep [[Acts 7:59-60](#)].

Stephen falls asleep. Jesus puts his body to sleep to await the Rapture. Stephen goes into the presence of Christ who is standing to meet him. Stephen is the first martyr of the church to go to be with his Lord.

The other young man there that day was a Pharisee, and he thought he had everything. He looked up into heaven when Stephen said that he saw the heavens open. I am sure that Saul looked up longingly and admitted to himself, I don't see anything, but I'd like to see what he sees. I have an empty heart. Stephen was a tremendous witness to Saul. Stephen was the one, I believe, who prepared Saul for the appearance of the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road, as we shall see.

Chapter 8

THEME: Conversion of Ethiopian eunuch (son of Ham)

We have now arrived at the second major division of the Book of Acts. You remember that we divided the book according to the Lord's commission in [Acts 1:8](#). First they were to witness in Jerusalem. Now we come to the Lord Jesus Christ's work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in Judea and Samaria. This section of the book includes chapters 8 -- 12.

Chapter 7 concluded with a most unusual scene. It included the two young men who had the greatest influence upon the early church. The one was Stephen, the deacon, the young man who gave up his life, the first martyr in the church. The other was a young Pharisee who had charge of the stoning of Stephen. His name was Saul.

Saul Becomes The Chief Persecutor Of The Church, And The Church Is Scattered (8:1-4)

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles [[Acts 8:1](#)].

Saul was taking the lead in the persecution of Stephen, and he was in the cheering section. Now this young man, Saul of Tarsus, was amazed when he saw the face of Stephen. Stephen was looking into the heavens, and there he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Young Saul looked up -- he didn't see anything. But, friend, he wished he could. He will see a little later. I believe that Stephen is the one who prepared Saul for the appearance of the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road.

Saul becomes the chief persecutor of the church. This causes the church to scatter. Actually, he does the church a favor. They were all settled down in Jerusalem, and I don't think they would have moved out had it not been for the persecution which Saul of Tarsus instigated.

Judea and Samaria are the next territories which the Lord had told them to enter. Judea surrounds Jerusalem, and Samaria lies to the north of Jerusalem.

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him [[Acts 8:2](#)].

I would like to make a few remarks here about Christian burial. There is a question that comes to us today: Is it right or wrong for Christians to be cremated? There is nothing in the Bible against it. No one will lose salvation by being cremated. However, the burial of a Christian is like sowing seeds. It is like putting the body into a motel so it can sleep until the Resurrection.

This is the way Paul speaks of it in [1Thessalonians 4](#). He speaks of the body as seed in [1Corinthians 15](#). You don't burn the seed before you plant it. Neither do you burn a person before you put him into a motel or hotel to go to sleep. Planting the body in the earth like a seed is a testimony -- an evidence of your faith in a future resurrection. Undoubtedly the body of Stephen was terribly mutilated. They took him up tenderly and put him in the ground as you would plant a seed. Stephen had gone into the presence of Christ, who was waiting in heaven for him. His body went into the ground to await the Resurrection. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" ([1Cor. 15:42-44](#)). I cannot see that cremation sets forth this idea. Rather, this is the picture of real Christian burial.

Some people protest that we are running out of space for graves. My friend, this old earth has taken in bodies for thousands of years now, and there is still room.

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison [[Acts 8:3](#)].

This was a young man full of zeal. Remember that he later wrote about himself -- "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church . . ." in [Philippians 3:6](#).

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word [[Acts 8:4](#)].

Here we see the effect of the persecution. Actually, it did not hinder the church but furthered the work of the church. Later on, Paul would give this same kind of testimony after he had been put into prison in Rome, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" ([Phil. 1:12](#)). I do not believe that the church can ever be hurt from the outside. It can be hurt from the inside, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Philip Becomes The Chief Witness After The Death Of Stephen (8:5-8)

We are introduced to the second deacon whom God used in a marvelous way.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them [[Acts 8:5](#)].

The Lord Jesus had said they should be witnesses unto Him in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria. Now the Word is going to Samaria.

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did [[Acts 8:6](#)].

Stephen had had the sign gifts of the early church, and now we see that Philip had those same gifts. Not everyone had them -- only those who were in the places of leadership, those who were taking the Word of God out to the world. There came the day when the sign gifts disappeared. They disappeared after the time of the apostles. By the time the canon of Scripture was complete and established, the credentials of a true man of God was correct doctrine rather than sign gifts.

For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

And there was great joy in that city [[Acts 8:7-8](#)].

The gospel has now come to Samaria. Philip is well received in Samaria, and there, of all places, the gospel brings great joy.

Now because the church is growing very fast, there are people actually joining the church who are not believers. Although they are really unbelievers, they make a profession of faith. We will now meet one like that.

Simon The Sorcerer (8:9-25)

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one [[Acts 8:9](#)].

He sets himself up as some great one. We find the same sort of thing today. If someone claims to be a faith healer, that sets him apart, believe me. People may declare that the faith healers are humble. Humility is not manifest in services where a person is supposedly healing people and implying that he is the only person there who has that gift. That is "giving out that himself was some great one," as Simon the sorcerer was doing.

To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries [[Acts 8:10-11](#)].

These people felt that Simon the sorcerer was like a god. Just as with these people, there are a great many people who are bewitched today. My friend, do not be bewitched by any man or his power. Even if a man is giving out the Word of God, do not look to the man. Look to the Word of God and check to see if he is presenting it accurately. Look to God. Turn to Him. When we get our eyes on man, we take our eyes off the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what had happened in Samaria.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women [[Acts 8:12](#)].

Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, and many men and women believed. Simon came in contact with Philip, and apparently he made a profession of faith under the ministry of Philip. I believe that Simon is the first religious racketeer in the church -- but, unfortunately, not the last. He professes to be a believer during the sweeping revival in Samaria under the ministry of Philip.

Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done [[Acts 8:13](#)].

Simon believes, he is baptized, and he becomes a friend of Philip. You would certainly think he was a real child of God. However, he is not converted. We will see that there are also others who are professing believers, but they are not born again. They have the head knowledge, they go along with the crowd, but they are not saved. Although they have been baptized with water, they have not been baptized into the church of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

There are a great many people like that today. I receive many letters from people who have told me that since they have been studying the Bible along with our program, they have begun to examine their faith. Many have come to realize that they have just been following along with someone else and that they have not been genuinely, personally converted. Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own

selves . . ." ([2Cor. 13:5](#)). It is a very good thing to check yourself. See whether you are in the faith or not.

This man Simon had all the outward trappings. He answered that he did believe in Jesus, and so he was baptized. But it was not a genuine faith.

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) [[Acts 8:14-16](#)].

When the apostles heard that there was a great moving of the Spirit down in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to check on it. They found a great company of professing believers who had not been born again. They had not been baptized into the church by the Holy Spirit. They were not saved. They had gone through an outward ceremony.

My friend, being baptized with water or going through some other ceremony will not make you a Christian. This gives the background to explain why Simon was able to put over his racket on the others. He liked this idea of performing miracles.

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost [[Acts 8:17](#)].

It may be that Philip had not told all the facts and conditions of the gospel. It may be that they had not accepted them. At any rate, now they are brought into partnership with the apostles. Now they believe the gospel and they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the Spirit of God has entered into them. I think this needs to be considered in its historical setting. It was the commission given to the apostles to open up each new area to the gospel. On the Day of Pentecost the gospel was given in Jerusalem. Peter and John are to bring it into Samaria and Judea. Paul is to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus had given this commission. We are now seeing it fulfilled here in Samaria.

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money.

Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost [[Acts 8:18-19](#)].

Simon wanted to pay for the gift. Why? Well, because this man is a religious racketeer. He wants to use it for profit.

How many such claims are made by individuals today! They claim that great miracles take place in their meetings and humbly say they have nothing to do with them. If that is so, why do they permit this type of deception to go on? Bewitch is the word used here. There have been religious racketeers around bewitching the multitudes from that day to this.

Persecution from the outside didn't hurt the church. It scattered the believers and actually worked for the furtherance of the gospel. What hurt the church was that people got on the

inside, professing to be believers when they were not believers. Always the church is hurt from the inside.

It was the same with the Lord Jesus. He was betrayed from the inside. He was betrayed to His nation by one of His own disciples. His own nation betrayed Him to the Roman Empire, and the Roman Empire crucified Him. Also today He is betrayed within the church.

It is like the wooden horse brought into the city of Troy. The city was impenetrable, it was invulnerable, until that wooden horse got on the inside. The Devil started out by persecuting the church, fighting it from the outside. He found that didn't work. It just spread the gospel. Then He decided to start his work from the inside. That is where he can get in and do damage. How many pastors could testify to that today!

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God [[Acts 8:20-21](#)].

This is the reason we know this man is not converted. Simon Peter declares that his heart is not right with God. He is not converted. His big interest is in the money. That was the important thing to this man.

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity [[Acts 8:22-23](#)].

You can't make it any stronger than the way Simon Peter says it.

Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me [[Acts 8:24](#)].

Simon doesn't ask to be saved. He doesn't ask for prayer for his salvation. He just asks that none of those terrible things happen to him. We do not know if this man ever came to Christ.

And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans [[Acts 8:25](#)].

The gospel is starting its journey to the ends of the earth. It started in Jerusalem. The apostles were there and a church was established. Soon the center will move to Antioch. Then it will move to Ephesus. Later it will move to Alexandria, then to Rome. Today, I don't think there is any particular center of the church. It has gone to the ends of the earth.

I believe that one of the finest vehicles to get the gospel to the ends of the earth is radio. Through this mechanical means the church can do what has not been accomplished since the first century when the gospel did penetrate to all the known world.

Philip And The Ethiopian (8:26-40)

In [Acts 8](#), [9](#), and [Acts 10](#) we find the record of three remarkable instances of conversion. I think that these three have been lifted out and given to us particularly for a lesson. Chapter 8 gives the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, a son of Ham. Chapter 9 gives the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a son of Shem. Chapter 10 gives the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a son of Japheth. You will recall that the entire human family is divided into these three categories. This was an ethnological and a geographical division made after the Flood. Ham, Shem, and Japheth were the sons of Noah. We find here that the gospel reaches out to representatives of these three divisions of the human family.

You will also notice from these examples that in a conversion three factors must be brought into focus before there can be a conversion. All three of these are evident in these three representative conversions.

1. The work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had taken this man Philip to Samaria where there had been a great moving of the Spirit of God. Then the Holy Spirit moved him down to Gaza, and again we see His moving in the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch. The Spirit of God had gone ahead to prepare the heart and also to prepare the messenger. This leading of the Spirit of God is absolutely essential. I'm afraid that a great deal of personal work is done in a haphazard manner and without the leading of the Spirit of God. I believe that we ought to make it a matter of definite prayer before we talk to anyone. We should talk to the Lord about the individual before we talk to the individual about the Lord. It is not simply that we need the Holy Spirit to lead us. What we need is for the Spirit of God to go ahead of us and prepare the way, then to call us up to where He is. We want to go where the Spirit of God is moving. This is the first essential in a conversion. We find it true in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and also in the conversion of Saul and of Cornelius.

2. The Word of God. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" ([Rom. 10:17](#)). The Word of God is the second essential. The Holy Spirit will take the things of Christ and will reveal them to an individual. It is the Spirit of God using the Word of God. But, wait a minute, there must be a human instrument.

3. The man of God. The Spirit of God uses the man of God who delivers the Word of God to produce a son of God, one who is born again. We will see this in the record of the conversion of this Ethiopian eunuch.

The second part of chapter 8 brings us to another part of the ministry of Philip. The gospel had gone to Samaria, and there were many genuine believers. But we also saw that in Samaria evil came into the church in the person of Simon the sorcerer. Now, in contrast to Simon the sorcerer, we come to the experience of Philip with a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip led this man to Christ, and he became a genuine believer, a wonderful man of God.

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert [[Acts 8:26](#)].

Samaria is an area which lies north of Jerusalem. Now Philip is told to go way down to the south. What we know as the Gaza strip is south, over along the Mediterranean. This was the trade route down into Egypt and Ethiopia. He would probably travel through Jerusalem to get there.

Philip had been speaking to multitudes in Samaria, and now he is sent down to a desert. He is to leave the place where there has been a great moving of the Spirit of God and go into a place, a desert, where there is nobody. However, when he gets there, he finds that God does have someone to whom he is to witness.

And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet [[Acts 8:27-28](#)].

We read here that this man of Ethiopia had charge of all the treasure of the queen. He was actually the Secretary of the Treasury. He was an official, and a high official of that day. This man was not traveling alone. He had a great retinue of servants and minor officials with him. He wasn't sitting in a chariot with the reins in one hand and a book in the other hand as we see him pictured. This man was sitting back in a chariot, protected from the sun by a canopy. He had a private chauffeur and was riding in style.

He was a citizen of Ethiopia, but he had come to Jerusalem to worship. This indicates that he was a proselyte to Judaism. He had just been to Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish religion. Although Judaism was the God-given religion, he was leaving the city still in the dark. He was reading the prophet Isaiah, but he was not understanding what he was reading.

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot [[Acts 8:29](#)].

The Holy Spirit is leading, as He must in any conversion. Philip is the man of God whom the Spirit of God is using. The Word of God is already in that chariot, for the Ethiopian is reading from the prophet Isaiah.

And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? [[Acts 8:30](#)].

Philip is a hitchhiker. When he hears what the man is reading, he asks, "Do you understand what you are reading there?" The Ethiopian doesn't; so he stops his retinue and invites Philip to come up and ride with him.

And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth [[Acts 8:31-33](#)].

Where was he reading? You will recognize that this is from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. He was reading the seventh and eighth verses. It is obvious that he must have been reading for some time. So it is also obvious that he must have read the preceding verses: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" ([Isa. 53:3-6](#)).

And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? [[Acts 8:34](#)].

What a marvelous place to begin! When the Spirit of God leads, how wonderfully everything opens up! He will take the things of Christ and make them clear.

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus [[Acts 8:35](#)].

The Holy Spirit will use the Word of God.

I do not believe that people can be converted by hearing a song. The song may affect a person emotionally and influence the will to make a decision for Christ. However, if the Word of God is not in it, there can be no true conversion. It requires the Word of God. How important that is!

Simon Peter, whom God used so wonderfully in the conversion of multitudes, makes it very clear that the Word of God must be involved if a person is saved. He wrote in his first epistle: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" ([1Pet. 1:23-25](#)).

When the Spirit of God uses the Word of God, what is going to happen? These men were in the chariot, discussing the Word of God. Philip was telling the eunuch about Jesus.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God [[Acts 8:36-37](#)].

Remember that Philip had had an experience with Simon the sorcerer up there in Samaria. He is not about to have a repetition of that. When this man asks for water baptism, Philip wants to be very sure that he believes with all his heart.

And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing [[Acts 8:38-39](#)].

Philip is snatched off the page of Scripture. He is not needed here anymore. The Ethiopian rides off the pages of Scripture in his chariot. He went on his way, rejoicing. Now what about this man? The first great church was not in the United States, nor was it in Europe, nor was it in Jerusalem, nor was it in Asia Minor. The first great church was in northern Africa. The Ethiopian evidently went back and through his witness and his influence, a church was begun there. You would find it very profitable to read about the early church in North Africa.

Now what about Philip?

But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea [[Acts 8:40](#)].

Azotus is Ashdod, which is over in the Gaza strip. To reach Caesarea, he would have gone through Joppa. Tel Aviv is there today. So he went, preaching the gospel along the coast up to Caesarea. The gospel has gone to Judea and to Samaria and is moving out. The eunuch has carried it down to Ethiopia. Philip is carrying it along the coast to Caesarea.

Chapter 9

THEME: Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (son of Shem)

This chapter tells about another remarkable conversion. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch was in a chariot; the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was down in the dust. Probably he was riding a little donkey when he went up to Damascus, and he was knocked right down into the dust.

When we get to the Book of Philippians, we will look at the theological, psychological, and philosophical aspects of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Here, we are dealing with the facts of what actually happened on the road to Damascus.

The Conversion Of Saul Of Tarsus (9:1-19)

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.

And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem [[Acts 9:1-2](#)].

When the persecution broke out in Jerusalem, the church went underground. The apostles remained in Jerusalem, but many of the others were scattered -- we found Philip up in Samaria and along the Mediterranean coast. The thing that triggered it was the stoning of Stephen, followed by persecution.

The other religious leaders in Jerusalem were satisfied after they had run the Christians out of Jerusalem. They were willing to let it stay at that point. But not Saul of Tarsus! He was the one who was breathing out threatenings and slaughter. He hated Jesus Christ. I do not think that the Lord Jesus Christ ever has had an enemy greater than this man Saul of Tarsus. He went to the high priest and said, "Look, I've heard that a group of them have run off up there to Damascus, and I'm going after them." The fact of the matter is that he intended to ferret them out, anywhere they went. His goal was to exterminate the Christians.

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? [[Acts 9:3-4](#)].

Paul will recount this incident twice more in the Book of Acts. In fact, Paul never tired of telling about his conversion. We find him going over it again in his Epistle to the Philippians where he gets right down to the heart of the matter and tells what really happened to him. Here we are simply given the facts. He will go over them again when he gives his testimony before king Agrippa -- that is a masterpiece.

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks [[Acts 9:5](#)].

Will you notice, here, the ignorance of Saul? He was possibly the most brilliant man of his day. He was probably a graduate of the University of Tarsus, the greatest Greek university of that day. He was a student in the school of Gamaliel, the Hebrew scholar. He was trained in the details of the Jewish religion. But he did not know the Lord Jesus Christ. "Who art thou, Lord?" Friend, to know Him is life. Saul didn't know Him!

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do [[Acts 9:6](#)].

Saul is right down in the dust on that road to Damascus. This is a remarkable conversion. He immediately reveals his conversion. This man who hated the Lord Jesus, who did everything he could against Him, now calls Him "Lord." And he asks what the Lord would have him do. He is ready to do the bidding of the Lord. He has been completely changed. "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" ([Matt. 7:20](#)). We can surely tell what has happened to this man.

And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man [[Acts 9:7](#)].

Later on it says that they didn't hear. Is this a conflict? No, they heard a voice but that was all. They couldn't understand what was said. It didn't make any sense to them. They

didn't see anyone. There was no one for them to see. They were speechless with amazement. We shall see this in more detail in [Acts 22](#) and [Acts 26](#).

And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink [[Acts 9:8-9](#)].

This man was blinded by the light that he had seen from heaven. Here was a man who was puzzled as much as any man has ever been. Some people jump up and down when they are converted. Some shout for joy. Not Saul of Tarsus. There never was a man as confused as he was. Had we met him on one of those three days in Damascus and had we asked him what had happened to him, his answer would have been, "I don't know." But he is going to find out.

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight [[Acts 9:10-12](#)].

Saul of Tarsus, a brilliant young man, is sitting in darkness and confusion. The Spirit of God comes to another man, Ananias, and sends him over to Saul of Tarsus.

Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake [[Acts 9:13-16](#)].

God states two reasons for calling Saul. He was God's chosen vessel for two things. First, he was to bear the name of Jesus. Notice that he is not called a witness as the disciples were. Although Paul may have seen Jesus at His crucifixion, he had not walked with Him in the days of His flesh. He really knew nothing about Him until that day on the road to Damascus. Now he is to bear that name. That is the same name we are to bear today, the name of Jesus.

He is to bear that name before three different groups: Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Gentiles are first on the list. Paul will be the great apostle to the Gentiles. Then to kings -- he will appear before kings, probably including Nero himself, and then to the

nation Israel. When Paul goes into a city, he always will begin in the Jewish synagogue. The synagogue will be his springboard to put him into the community, into the life of the city. From there he will reach the Gentiles. But he will go to the Jews first.

Second, the Lord said He will show Saul what great things he must suffer for His name's sake. He is chosen to suffer for Jesus Christ. In my judgment, there has never been anyone else who has suffered for the Lord as Paul the apostle suffered. None of us dare say, "I'm suffering more than anyone else. Why does God let this happen to me?" We may be suffering or we may think we are suffering more than we are. At any rate, none of us suffer as Paul the apostle suffered for the Lord.

Now as we look back on this remarkable conversion, you may remember that I said conversion requires the Holy Spirit using the Word of God through a man of God. Does this prove true in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus?

The Lord Jesus appeared to Saul personally. Before the Lord Jesus left His disciples, He told them that He was going away but that He would not leave them orphans. He promised them that He would send His Holy Spirit, and this is what the Spirit would do: "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you" ([John 16:14-15](#)). Now I think that when our resurrected Lord appeared to Saul personally, the Spirit of God opened his eyes spiritually and closed them physically so that he might see the Lord Jesus. So the Holy Spirit was definitely at work.

How about the Word of God? How was that used in the conversion of Paul? Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee. He knew a great deal about the Word of God. In fact, if there ever has been anyone saturated with the Word of God, he was Saul of Tarsus. When reading his epistles, it becomes obvious that he was very familiar with the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God were operative in Saul's conversion.

How can one say that God used a man of God as the human instrument to reach Saul? Although a man of God was not present at the time, I believe the man whom the Lord used to reach Saul was none other than Stephen. These two young men, Saul and Stephen, met only once, and that was when Saul stood with those who killed him. Stephen had looked up into the heavens and said, "I see heaven open and Jesus standing there!" (see [Acts 7:56](#)). Saul of Tarsus looked up into the heavens and couldn't see anything. Then he looked into the face of Stephen, and he knew that Stephen was actually seeing something. I believe that Saul actually hoped that the heavens would open and that he, too, could have a vision of God. And he did on the Damascus road. It was Jesus Christ who was revealed to him.

I believe that God uses a human instrument in the conversion of every individual, although that individual may not be present at the moment of the conversion. That is the reason you and I should cast our influence for the Lord Jesus Christ at all times.

Recently I received a letter from a man who is a barber. A certain man had been his customer for twenty years. One time when the customer got out of the chair and was paying for his haircut, he asked the barber, "Have you ever heard Dr. McGee on the radio?" The barber said he had not; so the customer walked over to his radio and turned it

to the station on which we can be heard in that town. He said, "Every morning at eight o'clock! You listen to him!" That was the last time these two men saw each other. The customer died suddenly within a day or so. You can guess the end of the story. The barber started listening to the program. He had been listening to it for over two years when he wrote to me. He has come to know Jesus Christ as his Savior. The human instrument in his conversion was his old customer.

Dr. C. I. Scofield is the man who edited the Scofield Bible. Before his conversion he was an outstanding international lawyer, but he had the problem of being a very heavy drinker. He had a godly mother who prayed for him continually. She died before Dr. Scofield was converted. On one occasion Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer was praying with Dr. Scofield. He told us that he heard Dr. Scofield say, "Lord, if my mother doesn't know that I have been converted, would You please tell her so?" God uses a human instrument in the conversion of every person although that person may not be present at the moment of conversion. I don't think a person can be converted without a human instrument. So why don't you be an instrument? That doesn't mean you have to get a person to his knees; it does mean that you get the good news of Jesus Christ to him. There will not be a real conversion without a man of God using the Word of God, directed by the Spirit of God.

Now, going back to Saul of Tarsus where we left him in Damascus, he is still sitting in solitary blindness, praying. Brilliant young man that he is, he is still somewhat confused since his conversion. So the Spirit of God appeared to Ananias and sent him over to help him.

And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost [[Acts 9:17](#)].

What a change! He is still Saul of Tarsus, but now he is Brother Saul. He is not the enemy. He is a brother. Any person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ is a brother to any other believer. Unfortunately, I must add that brothers don't always act like brothers.

Saul is to receive his physical sight. Also, he is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He is to be filled with the Holy Spirit for service. This is the experience which reveals itself in the life of the believer. He was baptized with the Holy Spirit on the Damascus road. In other words, he was saved on the Damascus road. But it wasn't until this man Ananias came to him that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He is going to become a witness for the Lord Jesus. He will receive his physical weight and his spiritual sight.

And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized [[Acts 9:18](#)].

Now he is baptized with water as a sign and seal of his conversion. The water had nothing to do with his salvation. He had been baptized by the Holy Spirit -- that is, he had been saved on the Damascus road. When Ananias had laid his hands on him, he had been filled with the Holy Spirit for service. And now he is baptized with water.

And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus [[Acts 9:19](#)].

Saul Begins To Witness At Damascus (9:20-25)

And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God [[Acts 9:20](#)].

Saul of Tarsus begins to witness immediately. Why? Because he is filled with the Holy Spirit. He began to preach "Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."

Friend, you must know who Christ is before you can believe what He did. He died to pay the penalty for your sins. It is because He is the Son of God that He could die for your sins. I couldn't die for your sins; you couldn't die for mine. No human being can die a redemptive death for another human being. Only Christ could do this because He is the Son of God. So Saul began to preach that Christ is the Son of God. That is the first thing you must know.

But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is very Christ [[Acts 9:21-22](#)].

The "very Christ" means the very Messiah. Saul confounded the Jews by preaching this. Saul of Tarsus is number one in several departments. He is number one in suffering; he is number one as a missionary. I think he is also number one in his I.Q. -- he was a brilliant man. He was able to confound those who attempted to tackle him intellectually.

And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket [[Acts 9:23-25](#)].

When the Jews couldn't win by argument, they resorted to another tactic, which was to eliminate the enemy.

I'm sure it must have been quite a thrilling experience to have been let down over the wall in a basket. Yet we never read anywhere in the New Testament that Paul toured the Roman Empire giving a lecture on the subject, "Over the Wall in a Basket." That ought to be a lesson for a great many folk who deal in sensationalism today. Here is a man who has had a most remarkable experience, but he has something more important to present.

We must never let our experience get in the way of presenting Christ. We must never let our person get in the way of the person of Christ. Sometimes I hear the very pious prayer,

"Hide the preacher behind the Cross." No, friend, that is not what he needs. Rather, we should pray, "Help the preacher to present Christ in such a way that the Spirit of God can take the things of Christ and show them to us. Help him to present Christ!" This was Paul's method.

Saul In Jerusalem (9:26-31)

And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple [[Acts 9:26](#)].

They thought this was a deception on the part of Saul of Tarsus, that he was worming his way in. They were experiencing persecution. And they probably had heard of Simon the sorcerer and the tactics he used in Samaria.

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus [[Acts 9:27](#)].

Good old Barnabas, whose very name means the "son of consolation and comfort"! He comes over and puts his arms around Saul. What a blessing he was to him! How we still need people who will put their arms around some new Christian and will help that new Christian along. Barnabas becomes the sponsor of Saul.

And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem [[Acts 9:28](#)].

Paul is accepted into the assembly at Jerusalem and joins forces with the Jerusalem church.

And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him [[Acts 9:29](#)].

These are not Greeks. They are Israelites who have a Greek background. They had been brought up outside Israel somewhere in the Greek world. The witness of Saul was so powerful that they concluded the only way to get rid of his effectiveness was to eliminate him, to kill him.

Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus [[Acts 9:30](#)].

Paul goes to his hometown. He probably went back home to tell his father and mother, brothers and sisters, and other relatives about Christ. We know nothing about them. Paul never talked about his family -- with one exception. In [Romans 16](#) he mentions some folk who are related to him.

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied [[Acts 9:31](#)].

The church continued to grow. The gospel went into Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. It will start to go to the ends of the earth very shortly.

Peter's Ministry In Lydda And Joppa (9:32-43)

And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord [[Acts 9:32-35](#)].

Because Peter was an apostle, he had the sign gifts of an apostle.

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works, and almsdeeds which she did [[Acts 9:36](#)].

This woman was engaged in social service. She had the gift of sewing. Do you mean to tell me that sewing is a gift of the Holy Spirit? Yes, it was for this woman. Many people today are seeking for some exciting, fleshly gift such as speaking in tongues. May I suggest seeking a gift that is practical? I say very carefully and kindly, "Dear sister, learn to sew."

Sewing was a gift of Dorcas. I doubt that she ever spoke at a missionary meeting or taught a women's Bible class. I don't think she ever had such an opportunity because she was one of the early saints. But she did a lot of wonderful things for folk.

And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber [[Acts 9:37](#)].

Notice how the Christians prepared for burial in that day.

And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them [[Acts 9:38](#)].

They sent word from Joppa to Lydda that a very wonderful woman in the church there in Joppa had died. They apparently believed that Simon Peter could raise her from the dead. At least they asked him to come down.

Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them [[Acts 9:39](#)].

You will notice that it was the widows who conducted this fashion show. They were all showing off the garments that Dorcas had made. Why did the widows do it? Because they were poor. They wouldn't have had any clothes if it had not been for Dorcas. She had sewn their clothes for them. This was her ministry. Sewing was her gift of the Holy Spirit.

But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive [[Acts 9:40-41](#)].

Here is an example of the exercise of a sign gift. We have in the Book of Acts, the historical book of the church, the ministries of Simon Peter who was an apostle and of Paul who was an apostle. Simon Peter was a minister to his own people; yet he was the one to open the door for the Gentiles. Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul, and he was the apostle to the Gentiles. The record states that each one raised a person from the dead. Quite possibly they raised others, but these are recorded to show that these men had sign gifts. They could perform miracles. They could heal the sick. They could raise the dead. These were the marks, the evidences of an apostle. They were apostolic gifts. Paul says that the apostles are the foundation of the church in the sense that the church is built on them. They are the ones who put down the New Testament on which the church is actually built.

Today we do not need sign gifts. The issue today is doctrine. At the end of the era of New Testament writings, the apostle John wrote his epistles. Listen to his instructions for detecting deceivers: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" ([2John 1:10-11](#)).

Toward the end of Paul's own ministry the record clearly shows that Paul did not exercise the gift of healing. For instance, notice that he left Trophimus at Miletum sick ([2Tim. 4:20](#)). Why did not Paul heal his friend Trophimus? Paul, you see, had come to the end of his ministry, and the sign gifts even then were beginning to disappear from the church. At the beginning of Paul's ministry nothing of the New Testament had been written. Paul himself wrote the second book of the New Testament. When he went into a new territory with his message, what was his authority? He had no authority except sign gifts. However, after the New Testament was in written form, the emphasis shifted from sign gifts to correct doctrine. Paul warns that if a man does not have correct doctrine -- even if he is an angel from heaven -- you should not receive him. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" ([Gal. 1:8](#)).

However, in the early days of the church, the apostles' sign gifts were important. Notice the reaction of those who heard of Dorcas being restored to life.

And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord [[Acts 9:42](#)].

The sign gifts were used to confirm to them the gospel of grace.

And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner [[Acts 9:43](#)].

A tanner used acid to tan his animal hides. It really made the place quite odoriferous. When I was in Joppa, we were shown the place where Simon Peter is said to have stayed.

Joppa is a rather picturesque village right on the water's edge, and the tanner's house was down there. The house looks old enough to have been there that long. So this may well have been the place where Simon Peter stayed.

Chapter 10

THEME: Conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion (son of Japheth)

Chapter 10 continues the record of the ministry of Simon Peter. Later Peter will pass from the scene, and the history will continue with the ministry of the apostle Paul. Although Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, Peter opened the door to the Gentiles by entering the home of Cornelius and presenting salvation through Christ to his household.

Cornelius' Vision (10:1-8)

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band [[Acts 10:1](#)].

Remember that Paul had been in Caesarea ([Acts 9:30](#)) and probably some of the other apostles had been preaching the gospel along the coast. Tel Aviv is really a part of old Joppa. As one travels up the coast from Joppa, the next place of any size is Caesarea, which was really a Roman city. It was the place where Pilate lived. The governor and those who ruled the land stayed there. This is where Cornelius was stationed. He was a centurion, which means he was a commander of a hundred soldiers in the Roman army. The Italian band was a cohort of Roman soldiers recruited in Italy.

A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway [[Acts 10:2](#)].

He was "a devout man." That means his worship was rightly directed. He recognized his dependence upon that which is divine. Remember that even a pagan can have devotion and a deep conviction to his gods. Sometimes we wish that Christians today had more devotion and conviction.

He was a devout man and "one that feared God." He was not a Jewish proselyte in the strict sense of the term, but gravitated toward Judaism and could be called a "proselyte of the Gate." Today we might say that he was a man who lived in the neighborhood, attended church on special occasions, was friendly toward the church, but was not actually a Christian. That could have been Cornelius. He feared God.

He "gave much alms to the people" means he gave many gifts of charity to the Jewish people. The nation Israel has always laid great stress upon giving. God had taught them this in the Old Testament. We speak of the tithe, but it is obvious from the Mosaic system that they actually gave three tenths. They gave for the running of the government (which was a theocracy at the beginning), they gave for the maintenance of the temple, and they gave a tenth of all that they produced. So they have been a giving, generous people.

It is interesting that even today many of our eleemosynary, that is, charitable foundations, were established by Jews. There is no group of people in our day that gives as generously

as does the Jewish community in its support of the nation Israel. They are a very generous people.

Cornelius "prayed to God always." This centurion took his needs to God. He needed to have more light. He wanted it. He probably didn't really know too much about prayer, but he prayed.

He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius [Acts 10:3].

This centurion was an officer in the Roman army, a career officer, and a man of influence. Also he had a tremendous influence in his own household, as we shall see. He was a good man to all outward observation. In America today he would pass for a Christian, a Christian of the highest degree, an outstanding man. But he actually was not a Christian. He had not even heard the gospel.

He is an example of a man who lived up to the light which he had. [John 1:9](#) says this of Jesus: "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." This centurion had not met Jesus Christ nor come into His presence, but he was living up to the light that he had. Paul is referring to those who do not live by the light they have in [Romans 1:19-20](#): "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." This is God's answer to that oft-repeated question, "What about the poor pagan, that 'good' heathen, who wants to know God but never had a chance? Is he lost?" The answer is that God will get light to such a person. God will enable him to hear the gospel. Now how will God get the gospel to Cornelius? The barriers seem insurmountable. The church at this time -- and for the first eight years -- was exclusively Jewish.

These Christian Jews were still going to the temple and observing many Jewish customs. They could do that under grace because they were trusting Christ. Then the gospel broke over into Samaria. The Jews in Jerusalem were surprised, but they recognized the hand of God in this. Now how is God going to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles? Paul is to be the great missionary to the Gentiles, but God has Paul out in the desert in Arabia, training him there. It is Simon Peter who must open the door to the Gentiles. God used perhaps the most prejudiced and religious bigot, the greatest extremist of the day. Obviously, the Holy Spirit directed every move in getting the gospel to the Gentiles. My friend, all genuine Christian work is directed by the Holy Spirit. No other work amounts to anything. The Holy Spirit had to work in the heart of the Gentile; the Holy Spirit had to work in the heart of the Jew. The Holy Spirit directed the bringing of the gospel to the gentile world.

And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God [Acts 10:4].

An angel of God appeared to Cornelius in a vision. He was not dreaming but was given this vision while he was praying.

Now I do want you to notice that there are certain things that do count before God. These are things which can in no way merit salvation, but they are things which God notes. The prayers of Cornelius and his alms had come up for a memorial before God, and God brought the gospel to him. Wherever there is a man who seeks after God as Cornelius did, that man is going to hear the gospel of the grace of God. God will see that he gets it.

And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do [[Acts 10:5-6](#)].

The angel tells him where to find Peter. He doesn't need more of an address. The odor of those hides down in that vat will lead them to the right place!

And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa [[Acts 10:7-8](#)].

These men won't have any trouble finding the tanner's house. While they are on their way, God must prepare Simon Peter.

Peter's Vision (10:9-22)

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour [[Acts 10:9](#)].

It is absolutely necessary for God to prepare Simon Peter. You see, Simon Peter didn't have the breadth that Paul had. Although he didn't have the background or the training that Paul had, God can use him differently. I believe it is a tremendous mistake to think that every person has to be poured into the same mold for God to use him.

And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.

And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air [[Acts 10:10-12](#)].

Notice that there were beasts, all kinds of birds, and all kinds of bugs.

And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean [[Acts 10:13-14](#)].

While Peter is wondering what this means, a voice speaks to him. Isn't it interesting that he calls Him, "Lord," but he doesn't obey what the Lord tells him to do?

Now don't miss this. Here is a man who is on this side of the Day of Pentecost. He is living in this age of grace when it makes no difference whether we eat meat or whether we don't eat meat. However, Peter is still abiding by the Mosaic system and he is not eating anything that is ceremonially unclean. He is sincere and honest about it. Someone may say that he ought to be broad-minded and eat everything. Well, you see that the Lord is teaching him that he is no longer under the Mosaic system and is free to eat anything. Today the big problem is that some people decide they don't want to eat meat and then they try to put everyone else under that same system. My friend, under grace you can eat meat or not eat meat. That is your business. Eating some certain food may give you indigestion, but it certainly will not change your relationship with the Lord.

And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common [[Acts 10:15](#)].

What God has made clean, don't you call unclean. You can eat anything because God has said so.

This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven [[Acts 10:16](#)].

Peter was left wondering what it was all about.

Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate.

And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee [[Acts 10:17-22](#)].

Simon Peter is to go to Caesarea. This little delegation from Cornelius gives an explanation to him, then extends an invitation to come with them to the house of Cornelius.

The Conversion Of Cornelius (10:23-48)

Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him [[Acts 10:23-25](#)].

We can see that Cornelius had quite an influence on his family and friends. He has called them together for this occasion. Also we can see that Cornelius is still a pagan, a heathen. When he is instructed by an angel to send for Simon Peter, he concludes that this man must really be important; so he falls down and worships Peter.

It is interesting to see Simon Peter's reaction to this. Friend, Simon Peter would never have let you get down to kiss his big toe. He just wouldn't permit it.

But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man [[Acts 10:26](#)].

Peter reached down and pulled him to his feet and said, "Stand up; I myself also am a man." I like the way he did that.

And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean [[Acts 10:27-28](#)].

Peter stepped into the house. What a step that was! It was the first time that Peter had ever been in a gentile house. He still is really a little baffled at God's command to go there.

He violates the first rule of homiletics when he begins his message with an apology. What he says is not a friendly thing to say. In fact, it is an insult. In essence, he said, "If you really want to know how I felt about this, well, I just didn't want to come. I've never been in the home of a Gentile before. Never before have I gone into a place that is unclean!" But he does go on to add, "Even though I have never before been in an unclean home, God has told me not to call any man unclean. We are all sinners and we are all savable." How would you feel, especially if you are a lady who is a housekeeper, if some visitor came into your home and his first words were, "I am coming into your home, which I consider dirty"? You wouldn't exactly respond with a warm, friendly feeling, would you? Yet this is the substance of what Simon Peter said.

Because God had showed him that there was neither clean nor unclean, he continues his message.

Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? [[Acts 10:29](#)].

This amazes me. Why would Simon Peter ask that question? Why didn't he immediately begin to tell them about Jesus Christ? Well, you see, the Spirit of God is in charge here, and He keeps Peter from rushing right into this.

This should be an important lesson for us. So often we are rather brisk and even crude in our witnessing. Because we find it difficult to witness, generally when we do it, we are very amateurish about it. We do it so abruptly and in such a way that often it offends people.

We need to be led by the Spirit of God. I personally believe that the finest kind of evangelism today is prayer evangelism. I mean that we should begin by praying for an individual. Then the day will come when we need to put legs on the prayer. Ask God to lead you. Friend, I know that He will lead you. If you have been praying for a loved one, or a friend, or a stranger, don't just go to him in your own strength and in the power of the flesh. If you do, you will fail. Let God be the One to lead you.

Let me share with you one of my first experiences of witnessing. When I was a student in college, I was very zealous to be a witness for God, but I was rather timid about it, and, very frankly, I wanted to be sure I had the leading of the Holy Spirit. I didn't have any money for bus or train fare, so I did a lot of hitchhiking. One time when I was out on the highway, a man in a brand new Model A Ford drove by and stopped fifty yards past me. Then he motioned for me to come on and get in. He said that he always looked over a hitchhiker before he picked one up. He introduced himself and told me he was a salesman for drug companies. He asked where I was going and I told him it was to Memphis. Well, he was going all the way to Memphis and he would be glad to take me all the way, but he did need to stop at several drug stores on the way to get his orders from them. Obviously, that was fine with me.

As we rode along, we talked of everything under the sun. Under my breath I was praying, "Lord, I'd like to witness to this man, but You will have to open the door for me. I'm not going to broach the subject because if I do, he'll think he has some religious nut in the car with him. If I open the door, he will probably open the car door and tell me to get out." So we rode along some more and just talked and talked. Finally he asked me whether I'd mind driving for him. Of course, I would love to drive that new car; so I did. He sat there and relaxed.

We got about sixty miles from Memphis and we had run out of conversation. There was a lull, and I was still praying, "Lord, we're getting near Memphis and there still hasn't been a door open for me. I'm not going to open it because I'm afraid he'll throw me out. You open the door for me if You want me to witness." We rode on for about ten more minutes, and then out of a clear sky he said, "You know, my wife and I went to church yesterday." He looked at me and laughed, and I laughed. Then he said, "I don't go very often. But that preacher said the funniest thing. He said Jesus was coming to this earth again. What do you think about that?"

Well, friend, I told him. Then I told him all about the first coming of the Lord Jesus. Finally I said, "The second coming of Christ means nothing to you now. You've got to come to Christ and accept what He did for you the first time He came if you are to have an interest in His second coming." This man was wide open. He drove me to the dormitory where I stayed at the college. He parked there and said, "I want to see you again." So I just blurted out, "Wouldn't you like to accept Christ as your Savior?" He said, "I sure would." I told him he could do that right there in the car. So we bowed our heads in prayer. I prayed and then asked him to pray, and he accepted Christ. Now I'll be honest with you, I would never have opened my mouth if the Lord hadn't prompted him to open up the conversation. We need to be led by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit had prepared his heart, and his conversion was genuine. The first sermon I preached after I was ordained in Nashville, as I looked down at the congregation, I noticed this man and his wife. He just sat there and smiled. Afterward I invited him to join my church. He said they had already joined a good church over in another part of town. He and his wife had become active Christians. What a wonderful experience that was!

We ought to be very careful in our witnessing that we are being led by the Spirit of God. Simon Peter does not walk right in and begin lecturing or preaching. He first finds out what is going on. "Why have you called for me? Why did you send these men for me?"

And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

And said, Cornelius thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God [[Acts 10:30-33](#)].

Cornelius tells him, "I really don't know why I sent for you, except God told me to send for Simon Peter. You must have some message for me."

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached [[Acts 10:34-37](#)].

Apparently Cornelius and those assembled with him would have heard certain basic facts about Jesus of Nazareth and also about the ministry of John the Baptist.

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly [[Acts 10:38-40](#)].

Notice carefully what Simon Peter does. He presents the facts concerning Jesus Christ, assuming there are some of the incidents which they already know. He makes it very clear to them that this Jesus was crucified on a tree and that He rose again on the third day. God raised Him and showed Him openly. This is the gospel. Nothing short of that will do.

This past Christmas I received many cards on which were printed the rather well-known message, "One Solitary Life." It is very fine; there is no question about that. It is very readable, but there is a strange omission -- a solitary omission in it. The most important fact is not recorded. It records that Jesus died, even mentions that He was buried, but completely leaves out His resurrection. Friend, there is not a single sermon preached, as recorded in the Book of Acts, that does not mention the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the very heart of the gospel. Until that is preached, the gospel has not been preached. Jesus Christ died, He was buried, He rose again from the dead. Those are the historical facts. Your relationship to a risen Savior determines your eternal destiny. He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was raised again for our justification ([Rom. 4:25](#)).

Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins [[Acts 10:41-43](#)].

You may remember that I have pointed out Peter's weaknesses and his faults. I actually rejoice in the fact that Peter was so human and so like another fellow I know very well by the name of McGee. But the important thing is that Peter preached the gospel. Here is the gospel: Jesus Christ died, He has risen, and whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins. If we do not tell people that message, we are not telling them the gospel.

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days [[Acts 10:44-48](#)].

This incident has been called the Gentile Pentecost. Peter was astonished that the Gentiles should receive the Holy Spirit. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit was made audible by their speaking in tongues. The tongues were an evidence to Simon Peter and the others with him that God would save the Gentiles and would give to them His Holy Spirit. Peter later relates this as evidence that these Gentiles had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and that God had granted repentance unto life also to the Gentiles ([Acts 11:17-18](#)). In [Acts 15:7-11](#) Peter again refers to this incident, declaring that it proves that the Holy Ghost has been given to the Gentiles and that they are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ just as are the Jews. It is hard for us to realize the great barrier that existed between Jew and Gentile. The Jews of that day simply could not believe that Gentiles were going to be saved -- in spite of the fact that the Lord had told them this was to be so. Then the Gentiles at Cornelius' house are baptized in water.

Again let me call your attention to the fact that the Book of Acts records three representative conversions. The Ethiopian eunuch was a son of Ham. Saul of Tarsus was a son of Shem. Cornelius was a son of Japheth. In each instance the Holy Spirit moved, using a man of God and the Word of God.

Chapter 11

THEME: Peter defends his ministry; gospel goes to Antioch

Peter recounts the events in connection with the conversion of Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. The news that the Gentiles had received the Word of God did not seem to bring any joy to the church in Jerusalem. They demand of Peter an explanation of his conduct, so Peter must defend his ministry -- which is really difficult for Simon Peter, as he himself feels apologetic about it.

Antioch becomes the center of the gentile church.

Peter Defends His Ministry (11:1-18)

And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them [[Acts 11:1-3](#)].

There was doubt and division. We need to understand that to the Jews the action of Simon Peter was a terrible thing. In fact, if we could have talked to Simon Peter a month before this, he also would have said it was a terrible thing to do. Actually, Peter gives them an apology. He makes it clear that he didn't want to do it at all, but that the Spirit of God was in the whole episode.

But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air [[Acts 11:4-6](#)].

Listen to his account. He is still amazed at God's command.

And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven [[Acts 11:7-10](#)].

The word for "drawn up" indicates all were suddenly withdrawn into heaven.

And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.

And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning [[Acts 11:11-15](#)].

Now Simon Peter tells what went through his mind.

Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? [[Acts 11:16-17](#)].

The purpose of the tongues was to give evidence to Simon Peter that the Holy Spirit had actually "fallen on them." How else would he have known that they had been baptized by the Holy Spirit which placed them in the body of believers?

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life [[Acts 11:18](#)].

Even the Judaizers had to shut their mouths now. They had nothing more to say in objection because this obviously was of God. So they glorified God. This was a great day -- the door had been opened to the Gentiles! We see now that the stage is being set for the gospel to move out to the ends of the earth.

Gospel Goes To Antioch (11:19-30)

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus [[Acts 11:19-20](#)].

The "Grecians," you will remember, are Jews who spoke Greek and were Greek in their customs. So far, you will notice, the preaching has been to Jews only.

And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch [[Acts 11:21-22](#)].

There is a great moving of the Spirit of God in Antioch, and the church in Jerusalem hears about it. So the Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to Antioch. We are going to see now that Antioch becomes the second center of the church. In fact, the center actually shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord [[Acts 11:23-24](#)].

This is a wonderful thing that is said about Barnabas. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of faith. And, my friend, there is no reason why every Christian shouldn't be a good person.

Barnabas became the pastor of the church there. He began "exhorting," which would be preaching and teaching. And the congregation grew, for "much people was added unto the Lord." As the church grew, it became evident to Barnabas that he needed an assistant pastor, and he knew where to get a good one.

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch [[Acts 11:25-26](#)].

Barnabas had to go find Saul and bring him with him. I detect in this that Saul was a little reluctant to come. He held back.

It was here that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ were first called "Christians." I do not think this was a term of ridicule. I think it simply meant that these were the ones who were the followers of Christ, they were Christians. It is an excellent name.

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul [[Acts 11:27-30](#)].

The incident that is recorded here is also verified in secular history. There was a general famine, but the effect was especially felt in Jerusalem where the church had been persecuted, decimated, and hurt. They were in dire need during this time. It is wonderful to see the fraternal spirit, the bond of love, that held the early church together. The other believers sent help to the troubled church in Jerusalem.

We remember that Saul had been one of those who had wasted the church in Jerusalem by his relentless persecution of them. How wonderful it is to see that by his own hands a transformed Saul now brings relief to that same church. That is Christianity in shoe leather, my friend. That is the way it ought to be.

Chapter 12

THEME: Death of James; arrest of Peter

In this chapter persecution strikes through Herod Agrippa I. James is executed and Peter is imprisoned -- but is miraculously delivered. Herod dies by a judgment of God. Although persecution comes, the church grows and the Word of God is multiplied.

Death Of James (12:1-4)

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church [[Acts 12:1](#)].

"Herod the king" is Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great (who attempted to put the Lord Jesus to death at the time of His birth). There never was a family more at enmity against God. As far as we know, not a single member of the Herod family ever really turned to God.

You will recall that up to this point the persecution against the church had been largely from the religious rulers, the Sadducees in particular. Now it moves into the realm of government. Persecution swings from religion to politics. Perhaps Herod did this to gain favor with certain influential groups. We know that he stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. The word vexed is hardly adequate to describe what he did. He carried on a brutal, unfeeling persecution of the church.

And he killed James the brother of John with the sword [[Acts 12:2](#)].

The fact is stated so bluntly -- he killed James with the sword. James becomes another martyr in the church. He is the second martyr who is named. I am of the opinion that there had been many others who had already died for the name of the Lord Jesus.

And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) [[Acts 12:3](#)].

James is slain, but Peter will be miraculously preserved in all of this. Here we find an example of the sovereign will of God moving in the church. I'm sure there were many who asked, "Why in the world was James put to death and Peter permitted to live? Why would God do that?" Many ask that same question today. The answer is that this is the sovereign will of God. He still moves like this in the contemporary church. I have been in the ministry for many years, and I have seen the Lord reach in and take certain wonderful members out of the church by death. And then there are others whom He has left. Why would He do that? If He had asked me, from my viewpoint as the pastor, I would say that He took the wrong one and He left the wrong one! But life and death are in the hands of a sovereign God. When you and I rebel against His decision, it is simply too bad for us. This is His universe, not ours. It is God's church, not ours. The hand of a sovereign God moves in the church.

James apparently was one of the heads of the church in Jerusalem. God permits Herod to slay him. Peter must have been a leader too. God permits him to live.

And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people [[Acts 12:4](#)].

The word Easter should be "Passover." Actually, they are at the same time because you remember that Jesus ate the meal with His disciples just before He was crucified. However, the Jews in Jerusalem at this time would have been celebrating the Passover and not Easter.

He really put Peter under guard here. The guard is strengthened and enlarged. Four quaternions of soldiers to keep this man! Wouldn't you say that he suspected someone would try to deliver Peter?

Peter's Deliverance (12:5-19)

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him [[Acts 12:5](#)].

Another translation would be "but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him." They didn't come before God with a kind of grocery-list prayer. They went before God and earnestly prayed that this man Simon Peter be delivered. Their hearts were in their prayers.

And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison [[Acts 12:6](#)].

How could Simon Peter sleep between two soldiers? Remember that he went to sleep also in the Garden of Gethsemane. I would say that Simon Peter was not troubled with insomnia. He didn't have any difficulty sleeping. It seems he could sleep just about any place and any time. What a wonderful confidence he must have had in God to be able to sleep between these two soldiers!

And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision [[Acts 12:7-9](#)].

The angel tells him to do a very reasonable thing -- get dressed. There was nothing in the way of alarm, just sensible directions. Peter thought the whole thing was a dream, and he would have walked out of there without his shoes!

When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him [[Acts 12:10](#)].

They certainly had enough guards to keep Peter in prison. I really think that they expected something like this. You remember that the Lord Jesus had come forth from the grave. That was a source of real embarrassment to them. They do not intend to let something like that happen to them again. So they more than doubled the guard.

Remember that the church in Jerusalem is praying for Simon Peter while this is happening. As soon as Peter is out of danger, the angel lets Peter go on his own.

Let me call attention to the fact that the translation in [verse 7](#) should be an angel of the Lord and not the angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord in the Old Testament referred to the preincarnate Christ. Jesus Christ is now at God's right hand in His glorified body. It was not the Lord Jesus who came down to deliver Peter. It was an angel whom the Lord Jesus had sent. The prayers of the church are definitely answered.

And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews [[Acts 12:11](#)].

Peter immediately recognizes that God has delivered him.

And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying [[Acts 12:12](#)].

The church at this particular time, and for about a hundred and fifty years after this, did not have church buildings. Today, when we talk of a church, we usually mean a building. We say, "The First So-and-So church is on the corner of Main and So-and-So." Actually, that is not a church at all; it is a building in which the church meets. The church is the body of believers. At the beginning the church never met in a public building. They had none. They met in homes.

Now Mary, the mother of John Mark, apparently was a woman of means and had a home large enough for the church to meet there. They were gathered together praying for Simon Peter to be delivered.

And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda [[Acts 12:13](#)].

"To hearken" means that she came to the door to listen. These were days of persecution. It was important to know who was knocking. Rhoda means "rose"; she was probably a servant girl.

And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate [[Acts 12:14](#)].

She forgot all about opening the gate, you see. She was so excited that she just left him standing there at the gate while she rushed back to the people who were praying.

And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel [[Acts 12:15](#)].

When she tells them Peter is at the gate, they tell her she is crazy. "No," she tells them, "Peter is at the gate." "Well, did you see him?" "No, I didn't open the gate, but I heard him and I know his voice." "Oh," they say, "it's his spirit." The word angel is *pneuma*, which really means "spirit" rather than angel. They are not saying that he has a guardian angel. They think it is his spirit. In other words, they think Peter is dead, that he has been slain by Herod.

It is interesting that while the church is praying for Simon Peter to be delivered, he is delivered; but when it happens, they don't believe it. They think he has been slain, and it is his spirit which has appeared.

It is a great comfort to me that the early church, with all of its tremendous spiritual power, did not believe that their prayers had been answered on this occasion. They didn't believe that Simon Peter had actually been delivered. Isn't that same thing true of us so many times? When we do have an answer to our prayer, we rejoice and talk about it as if we are really surprised. And we are surprised -- to be honest, we really didn't expect an answer. Yet God heard and answered our prayer. How gracious He is!

"But Peter continued knocking." That's just like Peter. Nobody's opening the gate because they don't believe their prayers have been answered -- they are in there arguing whether it is Peter or whether it is his spirit. Peter wants in and he is about to knock that gate down!

But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place [[Acts 12:16-17](#)].

They just couldn't believe their eyes. They just couldn't believe that their prayers had been answered.

Now Peter got out of town. Since God had miraculously delivered him, couldn't God have miraculously kept him safe in Jerusalem? Shouldn't Peter have said, "I'm just going to stick around. God has delivered me out of prison, and I know He can keep me"? Of course, God could keep him. But God expects us to use our common sense. Sometimes what looks like a tremendous faith in God is actually tempting God. Even after God has done some wonderful or miraculous thing for you and for me, He still expects us to use our common sense.

Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter [[Acts 12:18](#)].

Notice that Dr. Luke uses the diminutive -- "no small stir." When he says there was no small stir, believe me, he means there was a mighty big stir. Also in chapter 15 of Acts, when Judaism came into the church, Dr. Luke says they had "no small dissension." He means they had a regular knock-down-drag-out. They had a real fight, a regular donnybrook. But Dr. Luke always uses that very gracious and gentle diminutive -- "no small stir" and "no small dissension."

When the soldiers found what had happened and realized that Simon Peter was gone, I think they called out half the army. They must have made a house-to-house search. Maybe they threw a guard around the city to prevent his escape. There was no small stir according to Dr. Luke. I'll say not! There was a mighty big stir.

And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode [[Acts 12:19](#)].

Herod is cold-blooded and he is hardhearted. He has no regard for human life. By executing the guards, he is saying to the world that he does not believe Peter's escape was an act of God. He is holding his men responsible. He executes all the soldiers who were guarding Peter. Then he goes down to Caesarea, which is a resort area on the Mediterranean. Pilate enjoyed it down there, and many of the Roman rulers stayed down there. Actually, it was the Roman headquarters. Romans, like Pilate, didn't care for Jerusalem. They certainly didn't love Jerusalem as King David had. So now Herod beats it down to Caesarea to have a little vacation.

Death Of Herod (12:20-25)

Now we will see that God holds Herod responsible for the light He has given him.

And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country [[Acts 12:20](#)].

Tyre and Sidon did business with Herod and when he was displeased, this hurt the economy of Tyre and Sidon. So they came down to make an overture to Herod.

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them [[Acts 12:21](#)].

Herod was pompous and lifted up by pride. He was also a pleasing speaker. He was the kind of politician who would have been elected no matter what party he would run for.

Herod is one of the men who is a miniature of Antichrist. John tells us this in [1John 2:18](#): "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." The people hail him as a deity.

And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost [[Acts 12:22-23](#)].

Friend, God will not share His glory with anyone. "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" ([Isa. 42:8](#)). Herod refused to glorify God through the miracle of Peter's escape from prison. And now

he is willing to let the people deify him! God judges him. God is jealous of His glory. What a lesson we have here!

Now one would think that with all this persecution taking place the poor church would be destroyed and disappear.

But the word of God grew and multiplied [[Acts 12:24](#)].

Persecution didn't hurt the church at all.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark [[Acts 12:25](#)].

John Mark goes back to Antioch with Barnabas and Saul. Remember that they had been down in Jerusalem with the gift to the church there.

We have come now to the end of the second period of the Book of Acts. The gospel has gone into Judea and Samaria. Beginning with the next chapter we will see the movement of the gospel to the uttermost part of the earth. We are still in that movement today. I hope that you and I are both involved in it.

CHAPTERS 13 AND 14

Chapter 13

THEME: First missionary journey of Paul

We come now to the final major division of the Book of Acts. It is the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles to the uttermost part of the earth. This section includes chapters 13 -- 28.

You will remember that the key to the book is the fact that Jesus said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" ([Acts 1:8](#)). This was not a command to the church as a corporate body but to you and me individually. This witness was to go out to Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria, and then to the uttermost part of the earth. During the Jerusalem period we saw that the gospel went to the Jews, and the church was 100 percent Jewish -- no Gentiles. During the next period we saw the gospel go to the Samaritans and we saw the conversion of some Gentiles. Now the gospel moves out officially on its way to the ends of the earth.

On its way to the ends of the earth the gospel came to my ancestors and to your ancestors. Today you and I are the beneficiaries of the fact that someone went down the road of this world to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. You and I ought to be in the business of taking the gospel down beyond where we are to some who have not heard.

In this surge of the gospel beyond the boundaries of Simon Peter we find that Paul becomes the dominant leader and Peter disappears from the scene. God had used him mightily. Now Paul is the dominant one whom God will use.

As you will see by the map (p. 158), Paul begins his journey with Barnabas. The first stop is the island of Cyprus, the home of Barnabas. They cross the island, then set sail from Paphos to go over to Perga in Pamphylia. Then they enter the interior of Asia Minor, which is now Turkey, and go into the Galatian country. They visit Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe; then they return through Attalia, and then sail back to Antioch.

Barnabas And Paul Sent Out From Antioch (13:1-5)

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them [[Acts 13:1-2](#)].

You will notice as they begin their ministry it is "Barnabas and Saul." They will not be very far into the first missionary journey until Saul's name is changed to Paul. It is soon evident that Paul becomes the leader and the chief spokesman; then this team is called "Paul and Barnabas."

And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away [[Acts 13:3](#)].

These men are now set aside as missionaries. Did you notice the church that sent them forth into the world? It was not the church in Jerusalem. I say to you very candidly, the church in Jerusalem was not a missionary church. The church in Antioch had the missionary vision. They fasted and prayed because of their earnestness and their desire for the will of God.

They laid their hands on these two missionaries they were sending out. We still do that today to our missionaries. Why? Is it that we are imparting something to them? I'm afraid all that we can impart to someone by laying our hands on them is whatever disease germ we have on our hands. The laying on of hands is a means of identifying, of declaring that we are partners with that one. So the Christians in Antioch are indicating by placing their hands on them that they are in a partnership with Paul and Barnabas in the enterprise of getting out the Word of God. They are sending these men out as their representatives. They will minister at home while Paul and Barnabas go to the regions beyond.

So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus [[Acts 13:4](#)].

The important thing is that they are sent forth by the Holy Spirit. They will be led by the Holy Spirit of God. They went down to the seacoast town of Seleucia and sailed from there.

And when there at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister [[Acts 13:5](#)].

Notice that they had John Mark along with them.

From the very beginning Paul adopts a method which he followed through his entire ministry. He always used the Jewish synagogue as the springboard from which he preached the gospel. A friend of mine was criticized for going to speak in a synagogue. This man preached the gospel, I can assure you. I reminded his critic that Paul always went first to the synagogue to preach. If he was going to find fault with my friend, he would also have to find fault with the method of the apostle Paul.

Opposition At Paphos (13:6-13)

And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus [[Acts 13:6](#)].

It would appear that their ministry didn't have much success at Salamis. At least no record is given of any fruit from their ministry. They cross over the Isle of Cyprus to the other side of the island. In Paphos they encounter this opposition, which is actually satanic, through a sorcerer who had a tremendous influence on the Roman deputy, the governor of that island, Sergius Paulus.

Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith [[Acts 13:7-8](#)].

This is satanic opposition. This man had the governor under his influence. Unfortunately there are a great many rulers today who are under the influence of all kinds of cultism which is in opposition to the Word of God and in opposition to the gospel.

Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him [[Acts 13:9](#)].

Here his name is changed. Why was he called Paul? The name Paul means "small or little." Some think that he took that name as an act of humility, that he no longer wanted to bear the proud name of Saul. It is possible he took the name of the governor, Sergius Paulus, who was his first convert.

And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? [[Acts 13:10](#)].

Paul may have been a mild man in some ways, but I tell you, when he encountered this kind of opposition, he denounced it with all his being. He recognized it as satanic and he denounced it. I think we ought to do the same today.

And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand [[Acts 13:11](#)].

He was already in spiritual darkness. Now he is put into physical darkness as well.

Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord [[Acts 13:12](#)].

I call your attention to the fact that Paul had the sign gifts of an apostle. When he went over there to Paphos, he couldn't ask them to turn to the New Testament. There was no New Testament for him to preach from or for them to turn to. He couldn't preach from the Epistle to the Romans because he hadn't written it yet. They couldn't turn to the Gospel of John because John hadn't written it yet. So how will they recognize his authority? It is by the sign gifts. Today, the New Testament is written. We are now given a different way to recognize authority. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" ([2John 1:10](#)). This doctrine is in the Word of God, in the New Testament.

Probably the sorcerer had been doing some fancy tricks by the power of Satan. In that day a false prophet could probably heal and perform other miracles by the power of Satan.

Paul has his authority from the Lord Jesus Christ. He absolutely dominates the sorcerer by his message of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sergius Paulus comes to the light. He has been in spiritual darkness but now believes and is astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem [[Acts 13:13](#)].

That is all Dr. Luke says; he mildly records the fact of John Mark's departure. He doesn't issue a tirade against him. We will learn later that John Mark actually deserted. He showed a yellow streak and ran home to mommy. Remember that his mother was a prominent member of the church in Jerusalem and that her home was the place of meeting for the church there. When he reached Perga and got a look into the interior of Asia Minor -- the paganism and the physical dangers and hardships that were there -- he decided that he hadn't been called as a missionary. He heads in another direction, and that direction is home.

Later on we find that Paul refuses to take John Mark on another missionary journey. In fact, Paul and Barnabas finally separated. Paul went one way and Barnabas went another way. Paul was wrong about John Mark. God didn't throw him overboard because of his failure. Thank God, He doesn't throw us overboard because of our failure either. He gave John Mark another chance. Later on Paul was big enough to admit he had been wrong, and when he was close to his death, he actually asked for John Mark to come to him. "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" ([2Tim. 4:11](#)). This is the John Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark. He made good. Thank God. He gives us a second chance!

However here at the beginning John Mark is a failure. He left them and returned to Jerusalem. Meanwhile Paul and Barnabas go into the interior of Asia Minor.

Paul's Sermon At Antioch (13:14-52)

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.

And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on [[Acts 13:14-15](#)].

Paul follows his method of going first to the synagogue. Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, and they established synagogues in the cities in which they had settled. When visitors would come from Jerusalem, since they would want word from the religious center, they would invite the visitor to say something. This always afforded a marvelous opportunity for the apostle Paul. He certainly took advantage of it here.

This sermon which Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia is one of the great sermons, in my opinion; yet it is generally passed by today. It is the first recorded sermon of Paul, preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. When they asked Paul whether he would like to say something, you can be sure that he wanted to say something. That was his whole reason for being there.

Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience [[Acts 13:16](#)].

One would conclude from this introduction that there were some visitors there -- probably Gentile proselytes.

The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet [[Acts 13:17-20](#)].

Notice that Paul is doing the same thing that Stephen did before the Sanhedrin. He recounts Israel's history as a nation.

And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus [[Acts 13:21-23](#)].

After recounting their history, he will present to them the person of the Savior.

When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.

Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent [[Acts 13:24-26](#)].

These people apparently had heard of John the Baptist. Now Paul will get down to the nitty-gritty.

For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain [[Acts 13:27-28](#)].

As Paul is reviewing their history, he is pointing out that all this was done as a fulfillment of prophecy. They were fulfilling the prophets at the very same time they were reading them! They read without understanding what they were reading.

And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

But God raised him from the dead:

And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people [[Acts 13:29-31](#)].

You will notice that the core, the heart of every sermon preached in the New Testament, is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the message. Simon Peter preached it; now Paul the apostle preaches it. There is not the slightest disagreement in the message of these two men. Don't tell me these two men disagreed. They did not!

And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee [[Acts 13:32-33](#)].

This Old Testament reference, [Psalm 2:7](#), does not refer to the birth of Christ; it refers to the resurrection of Christ. "This day have I begotten thee" -- not begotten in the virgin birth but actually in the resurrection from the dead.

And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption [[Acts 13:34-35](#)].

Paul enlarges upon the Resurrection. He is citing the same that Simon Peter did on the Day of Pentecost.

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses [[Acts 13:36-39](#)].

Now he is pinning this thing down. He is explaining the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is actually asking them for a decision to believe on the Lord Jesus.

Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets;

Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you [[Acts 13:40-41](#)].

Here is his appeal to them. He urges them not to reject the message.

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath [[Acts 13:42](#)].

There were Gentiles there who said, "We would like to hear this same message."

Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God [[Acts 13:43-44](#)].

There must have been much discussion of Paul's message. The next Sabbath Day almost the entire city was there to hear Paul preach.

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming [[Acts 13:45](#)].

This time there was a big commotion because the leading religious rulers of the synagogue opposed Paul and Barnabas.

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but

seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region [[Acts 13:46-49](#)].

Here is the recurring pattern. The gospel is preached to the Jews first; they reject it; so they turn to the Gentiles with the good news.

But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts [[Acts 13:50](#)].

They were run out of town; they actually were forced to leave the town.

But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

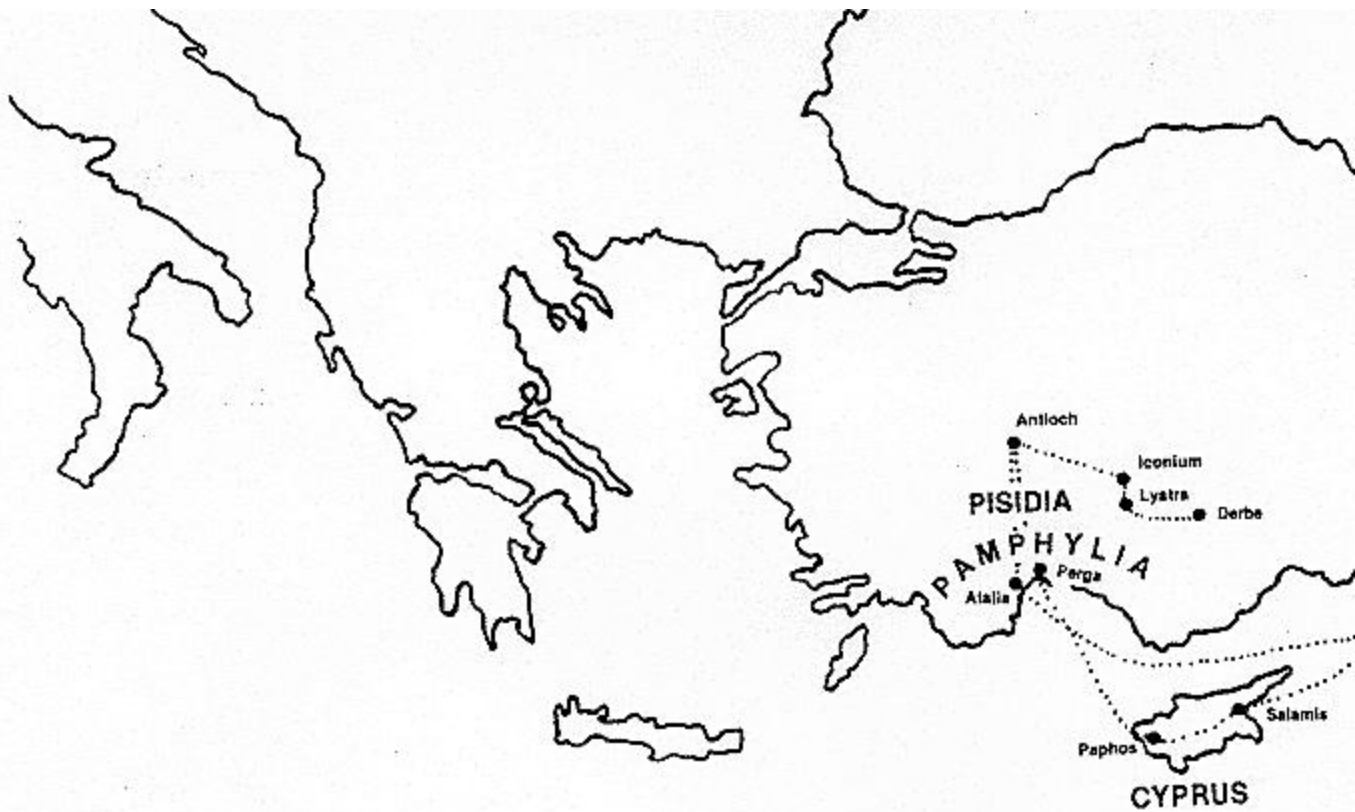
And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost [[Acts 13:51-52](#)].

Notice the condition of those who were converted. They were filled with joy, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost.

Galatian Country (13:14-52)

Now in chapter 14 Paul and Barnabas face the almost impenetrable paganism of Galatia. I personally believe that the Galatian field was the hardest mission field that Paul ever entered. You need only to read the Epistle to the Galatians to discover that. Galatians was the harshest epistle that Paul wrote. He wrote it to a group of people who had a spiritual bent in the wrong direction. They were constantly going off the track. He visited those churches more than any others.

Let me give you this brief background of the Galatian country which Paul is entering on this first missionary journey. The people for whom the province was named were Gauls, a Celtic tribe from the same stock which inhabited France. In the fourth century B.C. they invaded the Roman Empire and sacked Rome. Later they crossed into Greece and captured Delphi in 280 B.C. At the invitation of Nikomedes I, king of Bithynia, they crossed over into Asia Minor to help him in a civil war. They were a warlike people and soon established themselves in Asia Minor. In 189 B.C. they were made subjects of the Roman Empire and became a province. Their boundaries varied, and for many years they retained their customs and language. The churches which Paul established on this first missionary journey were included at one time in the territory of Galatia, so this is the name which Paul would normally give to these churches.



Picture: Map Of Paul's First Missionary Journey

The people were blond orientals. These Galtic Celts had much of the same temperament and characteristics of the majority of the American population, which came out of that same stock in Europe and the British Isles. Caesar had this to say of them: "The infirmity of the Gauls is that they are fickle in their resolves, fond of change, and not to be trusted." Another writer of that period described them as "frank, impetuous, impressible, eminently intelligent, fond of show, but extremely inconstant, the fruit of excessive vanity." Paul wrote them a very harsh letter because they needed that kind of letter. The majority of the people in the United States are like them. That is the reason so many cults and "isms" have begun in this country. We are a fickle people. One day we follow one leader, and the next day we follow someone else. It is amazing to watch the polls of our political candidates. If they make one statement, one slip of the tongue, the entire population shifts from them to someone else. We are a fickle people -- very much like the Galatians.

All of this should make this section especially interesting to us. Martin Luther used the Epistle to the Galatians for the Reformation because it was written to folk who are like we are.

Chapter 14

The Work In Iconium (14:1-7)

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed [[Acts 14:1](#)].

If you follow the journey on a map, you will notice that they crossed over the length of the island of Cyprus, and then sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. Then they traveled up into the country of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. These are the cities of Galatia. So they are now in the heartland of Asia Minor.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles [[Acts 14:2-4](#)].

Paul and Barnabas cause quite a division in the city. You must remember that Paul and Barnabas are both Jews. They always went to the Jews first and used the synagogue as a springboard to get to the Gentiles.

And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,

They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:

And there they preached the gospel [[Acts 14:5-7](#)].

Because they didn't get a very good reception in Iconium, they fled to Lystra and Derbe. However, we know that they came back through Iconium so there must have been some believers there.

The Events At Lystra (14:8-28)

And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:

The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked [[Acts 14:8-10](#)].

As we have seen, Paul and Barnabas had the gifts of an apostle, the sign gifts. They came into these places without any New Testament with the message of the gospel. What were their credentials? How could they prove their message was from God? The sign gifts were their credentials -- they needed them. Today we have the entire Bible, and what it has to say. If only we could get people to do that!

The other day I played golf with a very affable, generous, bighearted man. He is an unsaved man, and he told me very candidly that he was chasing around. Mutual friends

had asked me to play with him. I attempted to talk with him about the gospel. He knew the facts of the gospel as well as I do. And you know something else? He believed them. He said he believed that Jesus died and rose again, and he believed that if he put his trust in Jesus, He would save him. So I asked him why he didn't do that. Then he began to mention names, names of certain men whose lives just didn't measure up to their profession of faith. So I said to him, "For goodness sake get your eyes off men. In the first century the apostles performed miracles, and men got their eyes on the apostles. So it was necessary to get their eyes off the apostles and turn them to the Book which presents the Lord Jesus Christ. You need to get your eyes on the Word of God and learn what God says today. He tells us that the important thing is our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. All those other men you mention will not even enter into the picture when you stand before the Lord Jesus someday. The only question will be your personal relationship to Jesus Christ as it is revealed in the Word of God. Go to the Word of God." I'll be very frank with you; I didn't really get very far with this man. He did say that I had given him a new approach; he had never heard it that way before. He thought maybe he would try it. I encouraged him again to get his eyes off other Christians because we all have feet of clay.

The people at Lystra were looking to Paul and Barnabas.

And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men [[Acts 14:11](#)].

The man had real faith to be healed. When Paul told him to stand upright on his feet, he leaped and walked. Remember that the people in the area were pagan, heathen people. When they saw what Paul had done, they began to shout that the gods had come down in the likeness of men. Their eyes were on Paul and Barnabas. They were really excited about them.

And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people [[Acts 14:12-13](#)].

Paul is the leader of the team, the chief speaker, and the people want to make them gods. They bring garlands and sacrifice and are ready to worship them. Fickle! Does it remind you of someone else? In America it is a baseball player one year, then a politician, then a football star, then another politician. By the following year they are all forgotten, and it is someone else new. It is the same way with the preachers. One can preach the Word of God, and everyone will acclaim him as a wonderful preacher. Then the next day they are ready to crucify him.

Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from

these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways [[Acts 14:14-16](#)].

Paul and Barnabas are not only startled and amazed that these people want to worship them, but they are completely shocked. They rush in among them, shouting, "We are human beings like you are!" You will remember that Peter had to say the same thing to Cornelius when Cornelius bowed down to him to worship him.

Certainly none of us is to bow down to worship any man. A Christian is not to be so obsequious that he gets down to lick the boots of anyone. Unfortunately, even in Christian work, we find some people who want others to bow to them. How tragic that is.

Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them [[Acts 14:17-18](#)].

He is attempting to turn their attention to the living God who is the Creator. He wants to draw them away from their heathen, pagan idols and the mythology of the Greeks.

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead [[Acts 14:19](#)].

How amazing this is. Such fickle people! One day they are ready to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods. The next day they stone Paul to death.

(How like Americans -- we follow fads. One time it is the hula hoop. Then it is the miniskirt. We simply follow one fad after another.)

They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city "supposing he had been dead." Do you think he was dead? I'll tell you what I think. I think he was dead. Later Paul writes of the experience he had: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" ([2Cor. 12:2-4](#)). Who was that man? It was Paul himself. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" ([2Cor. 12:7](#)). I don't think that crowd left him there half dead; I think they left him dead. I believe that God raised him from the dead.

Why would God permit this stoning? [Galatians 6:7](#) tells us: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Paul reaped what he had sowed. He had ordered the stoning of Stephen. Maybe someone will object that now he is converted. Yes, but even after conversion we will reap whatsoever we have sown. This is

a law of nature as well as a law operating in our lives. We shall reap whatever we sow. Because Saul took part in the stoning of Stephen, years later the same thing happened to him.

Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe [[Acts 14:20](#)].

This is miraculous. A man who has been stoned would be brutally wounded. Paul rose up, and the very next day he was able to travel. This is a miracle whether or not he was actually raised from the dead.

And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God [[Acts 14:21-22](#)].

If you are following the map, you will notice that Derbe is the pivotal point. It is the end of the line. At this point they turn back and retrace their steps through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed [[Acts 14:23](#)].

They return through Pisida and Pamphylia, and preached again in Perga. Then they go to Attalia, and sail from that port back to Antioch.

And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

And there they abode long time with the disciples [[Acts 14:26-28](#)].

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch to give a report of the work because this is the church that had sent them out. They revealed that God had now definitely opened the door of the gospel to Gentiles. When the gospel started out, the churches were comprised entirely of Hebrews. Then they became partially Gentile. And now the gospel is going definitely to the Gentiles. Now the churches in Asia Minor are comprised entirely of Gentiles. Although there may also have been some Jews in these churches, it seems that in most places the Jews rejected the gospel and the Gentiles received it.

Chapter 15

THEME: The council at Jerusalem

Now that the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas has been completed and the churches which they established in the Galatian country are 100 percent Gentile, the church faces its first great crisis.

In Judea many of the Hebrew converts are Pharisees who have no intention of giving up the Mosaic system. They assert that the Gentiles must also come into the church through the Mosaic system. In fact, they believe that Gentiles are not saved until they are circumcised.

The news of this contention reaches the church in Jerusalem. The apostles must now face up to the question. What course is the church to take? So in Jerusalem the first church council convenes to resolve the matter.

Down through history you will find that there have been other church councils that have decided other great issues, such as the validity and the inerrancy of the Scriptures. Another council decided upon the deity of Christ and the fact that He is both God and man. And there have been other important councils when differences arose in the church. Some folk may think that we need a council in our day. We certainly do. However, I am afraid there could never be an agreement because too many churches are far removed from the person of Christ. A council that cannot meet around the person of Christ is not actually a church council because the Lord Jesus Christ is the very center of the church. The issue is not one of ritual, or of membership, or of ceremony. The central issue is that of one's personal relationship to Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, people who are personally far removed from Christ and who do not experience fellowship with Him want to argue about ritual. Oh, they may carry a big Bible under their arm, go to church on Sunday and sing the hymns lustily, but on Monday the Lord Jesus is far removed from them.

Friend, the Lord Jesus should occupy the very center of our lives. We should think of Him constantly. We should not see a sunset without thinking of the One who made it. He should be brought into our daily living, into all situations of life, our tensions and our anxieties.

Now let's turn our attention to this council at Jerusalem. An outstanding group has come together here. These men have convened in order to consider this great issue: law versus grace, or law versus liberty.

The Question Of Circumcision (15:1-6)

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved [[Acts 15:1](#)].

Here is the crux of the issue. It is not simply a question of whether one should be circumcised or not, whether one should eat meat or not. The question is: Must one do any of these things in order to be saved? Now we will move on and penetrate a little deeper into their problem.

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question [[Acts 15:2](#)].

Again I call attention to Dr. Luke's use of the diminutive. "No small dissension" really means they had a regular donnybrook! It was a heated debate.

We need to realize here that it is really the gospel which is under question at this council. The Epistle to the Galatians gives us a full explanation of the council.

The gospel is used in two senses in the New Testament. First of all, there are the facts of the gospel. These are absolutely basic and essential. Paul gives those facts in the first five verses of [1Corinthians 15](#). It is the death, the burial, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." These are the facts of the gospel, and they concern the person of Christ. I move on down to [1Corinthians 15:15-17](#): "Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." Face up to it, my friend; if Christ is not raised from the dead, then there is no gospel at all. But thanks be to God, ". . . Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" ([1Cor. 15:20](#)). The facts of the gospel are the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

The second sense of the gospel is the interpretation of the facts. It is this interpretation which is the basic truth in the Epistle to the Galatians. That is the crux of the whole matter at this first council at Jerusalem. Thus the gospel also hinges on this fact which Paul states in [Galatians 3:22](#): "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." What must one do to be saved? Nothing more nor less than believe. Again in [Galatians 2:15-16](#): "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." That is important to see.

The Judaizers of that day were different from the liberals of today. The liberal will actually deny the facts of the gospel. He will deny the physical resurrection of Christ. Some go so far as to say that Jesus Christ is just a myth, that He never lived or died. Most of them do not try to upset history quite to that extent. However, they deny that Jesus died for our sins.

In the first century the Judaizers did not deny the facts of the gospel -- there simply were too many witnesses. Paul says that over five hundred people saw the risen Christ at one time. My friend, if you get five hundred witnesses into any law court, you will win your case! Also the apostles were witnesses to the risen Christ. They were there to testify to it. The facts of the gospel were not under question by the Judaizers.

The contention arose over the interpretation of those facts. What did Christ do for you on the Cross? Is the work of Christ adequate to save you? Do you need to go through some ritual or something else in order to be saved? Must you go through the Law? These are the questions they were asking.

Now let's return to [Acts 15](#) and go with Paul and Barnabas up to Jerusalem.

And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them [[Acts 15:3-4](#)].

Paul and Barnabas give a report to the church in Jerusalem just as they had done to the church in Antioch. They tell them, "We have preached the gospel, and men and women over in the Galatian country have trusted Christ. They know nothing about Mosaic Law. They trusted Christ and were saved."

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses [[Acts 15:5](#)].

They wanted to add something to the gospel. Friend, whenever you add something to the gospel, you no longer have the gospel but you have a religion. You no longer have the gospel of Jesus Christ. The only approach that you can make to Jesus Christ is by faith. We must all come to Him by faith. He won't let us come any other way. Jesus said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" ([John 14:6](#)). He's bottled the whole world into this. There is only one question God asks the lost world: "What do you do with My Son who died for you?" God doesn't give us some little Sunday school lesson by saying, "I want you to be a good boy. I want you to join a church. I want you go through this and that ritual." That kind of teaching is only for an insipid religion. It does not come from God. God is saying, "My Son died for you. What will you do with Him?" The answer to that question will determine your eternal destiny. This is the issue being discussed at the council in Jerusalem. This is really exciting.

And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter [[Acts 15:6](#)].

The Decision Of The Council (15:7-21)

The apostles and elders had come together to argue this thing out. The disputes were hot and heavy. A decision must be made, and Simon Peter is the first one to express his decision.

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe [[Acts 15:7](#)].

I don't think that this is the first time Peter spoke. If he had been quiet through all that time of disputing, it certainly would not have been consistent with his character. No, I'm of the opinion that he had already put in his two bits worth before this. But now he is going to sum up the whole thing. This is not a new decision for Peter. Peter had already declared this same thing at the time of the conversion of Cornelius.

Remember that Peter himself had been shocked by the truth of it. He was told to go into the home of a Gentile and preach the gospel without the Law. The people were uncircumcised, they didn't follow the Mosaic system, they ate pork -- and yet they were saved!

The council would listen to Simon Peter because he was narrow-minded -- I don't say this in an ugly way -- I mean that he was a Jew of the Jews. He himself said he had never eaten anything unclean, and he wouldn't have thought of entering the home of a Gentile. He stuck as close to the Mosaic system as any man could. So if Peter spoke up, they would listen.

Now he testifies that the Gentiles had heard the gospel from his mouth and had believed. You mean they were actually saved? Yes, they were saved by grace. Peter himself had to learn that salvation is not decided by whether one eats meat or doesn't eat meat, whether one eats pork or doesn't eat pork. Salvation is not dependent on our observation of the Sabbath, or Sunday, or any other day. Salvation is by grace through faith. We are free to choose what we wish to do about these other things. We have freedom in that connection.

And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith [[Acts 15:8-9](#)].

Does Peter say that God purified their hearts by keeping the law? No! By going through a ceremony? No! By joining a church? No! By faith. Peter said, "I went into the home of Cornelius. I gave them the facts of the gospel. They believed and were saved -- the Holy Ghost came upon them just as He had come to us in Jerusalem."

My friend, this is always the only way of salvation. It is by faith. You don't have to do anything to merit your salvation. Jesus Christ did it all for you nineteen hundred years ago. All God asks you to do is to accept His Son who died for you.

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? [[Acts 15:10](#)].

Simon Peter makes a tremendous admission here. He says that neither they nor their fathers kept the Law. I have said this many times before, and I will say it many, many times more: God has never saved anybody through the keeping of the Law. Do you know why? There has never been a person who has kept it. God saves on one basis and one basis only: faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before the time of Christ, men brought a sacrifice to God. They brought that sacrifice by faith. Abel understood that the little lamb could never take away sin. He understood that

the little lamb pointed to the One about whom God had told his mother. He had said that the Seed of the woman would come and would bruise the head of the serpent ([Gen. 3:15](#)). Abel believed that. He believed God. He was saved by faith.

So Simon Peter says, "To tell the truth -- why don't we admit it -- we can't keep the Law." You see, there is nothing more hypocritical than to pretend that you are living life on a high spiritual plane, that you are living by the Sermon on the Mount and you are keeping God's Law. There is no use pretending.

I wish I could look you in the eye and ask you, "Why don't you admit that you are a lost sinner? Why don't you confess that you do not please God, that you have no capacity for Him? Why don't you come to God as a sinner and trust Christ as your Savior?" He will receive you! ". . . Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" ([John 6:37](#)). That is the way I came to the Lord. Everybody I have ever met who has been saved has come to Him in that way. Saul of Tarsus came like that. The Ethiopian eunuch came like that. All who have come to Christ have come like that.

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they [[Acts 15:11](#)].

Simon Peter puts it so nicely. The Jews must be saved in exactly the same way that the Gentiles are saved. I'm pretty sure that Simon Peter still didn't eat pork at this time, but he implies, "I'm not saved because I don't eat pork; I'm saved because I have trusted Christ." He is saved by the grace of God.

Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them [[Acts 15:12](#)].

What a story they had to tell! I wish I could have sat in on the council of Jerusalem. Especially I wish I could have heard these two men tell their experiences in the Galatian country.

The next man to get up to speak will be James. I want to stop here for a moment to explain that this was not James, the brother of John, as he had already died a martyr's death ([Acts 12:2](#)). There is some question as to who this James was. We know that he became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He has already been mentioned as a leader by Peter in [Acts 12:17](#). This may have been James, the son of Alphaeus, one of the twelve ([Matt. 10:3](#)). However, the tradition of the church from the early church fathers has identified this man as James, the half brother of our Lord ([Matt. 13:55](#)), the same one who wrote the Epistle of James.

I should stop here to make another remark. I believe that the proper way to study the Book of Acts is to study it along with the Epistles. For example, we have already mentioned the Epistle to the Galatians, and during the study of [Acts 13](#) and [Acts 14](#) would be a good time to read that Epistle. At this point in [Acts 15](#) it would be appropriate to study the Epistle of James.

James is going to sum up the thinking of this council at Jerusalem, and He will put down God's program for the future.

We need to remember that these men stood with their noses pressed right up to the window of the opening of a new dispensation. The church had been brought into existence at Pentecost; it was still very new, in its infancy. Some people still do not understand that we live in the age of grace, the period of the church. So let us not be too critical of these men who stood on the threshold of this new age.

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me [[Acts 15:13](#)].

I take it that after Simon Peter spoke and after Paul and Barnabas gave their report, there was silence because no one had anything to say. Even the Judaizers were silenced by the reports of what had taken place.

When James speaks to the crowd on that day, he asks them to "hearken," that is, to really listen. What he has to say is very important. So he means that you and I should listen to him, too. Probably all of us should spend more time listening to God and less time doing the talking. Well, now let's listen.

Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name [[Acts 15:14](#)].

James completely agrees with Peter. They state the plan of God for today. Is God saving the whole world? No. Is God bringing in His Kingdom? No. Then what is God doing today? He is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. We learn in Revelation that standing before the throne of God there will be those of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. The Word of God is to go out into the world. There will be opposition to it and there will be apostasy, but the Word of God is to go out to all the world because God is calling out a people for His name.

This is why I am so anxious to get out the Word of God. Right now there are people of every color, every clime, every condition, every race, and practically every nation who hear Bible teaching by radio. We broadcast on stations that pretty well circle the globe. Thank God we can use this means to get out the Word of God. What does God do with that Word? He is calling out a people for His name. Not everyone who hears believes the Word. Not everyone accepts the good news of Jesus Christ. But of those who hear, God calls out a people for His name. Underline [verse 14](#) in your Bible -- I have it circled in mine. God is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. I am so thankful that He has given me the opportunity to tell people about salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ and to teach them the Word of God.

And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written [[Acts 15:15](#)].

Do you think this new age is contrary to the teaching of the Old Testament? Well, it is not. The words of the prophets agree to this.

Now James begins to quote a prophet (see [Amos 9:11-12](#)). "After this," which in the prophet is "in that day." What does it mean? After what? After God has called out a people for His name. God today is calling out individuals for His name. They become a part of the church, the body of believers. The day is coming when God will remove His

church from this world -- this we call the Rapture. It is the next event on the agenda of God. After this -- after His church has left the earth --

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up [[Acts 15:16](#)].

The tabernacle of David is fallen down -- there's no doubt about that. There is no one around from the line of David. The only One who has that claim is sitting at the right hand of God at this very moment. But God is going to build it again. He is going to send Jesus back. God says to His Son: "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" ([Heb. 1:13](#)). God is bringing all the enemies of Christ to be put under His feet. The rebelliousness is going to be over one of these days. Until the day when He sends Jesus back, the Spirit of God is saying, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" ([Ps. 2:12](#)).

The program of God is clearly outlined. He is calling a people out of the world now. His second step with the world will be to build again the line of David. That is, he will reestablish the Davidic rule over Israel.

That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things [[Acts 15:17](#)].

Today he is calling a people out of the Gentiles. However, in that day there will be a great turning to God. This will be after the church has left this world. These are the ones who will enter the Kingdom. The "residue of men might seek after the Lord" and "all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called" will turn to the Lord. This, then, will be the third step in God's program.

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world [[Acts 15:18](#)].

James has been doing the summing up. He understands that there is a definite program which God is following. Now James is ready to hand down his decision, and it is a very important decision.

Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood [[Acts 15:19-20](#)].

The decision is that Gentiles who have turned to God are not to be put under the Mosaic system. However, they are going to ask the Gentiles to do certain things out of courtesy. They will ask them to abstain from pollutions of idols. The reason this is so specifically mentioned will come up again in 1 Corinthians in the section about eating meat. The situation was that the gentile world of that day worshiped idols, and in a city like Corinth, for example, the people would take their best animals and offer them to their pagan gods. They were very clever about this. They would take the animal in and make an offering of

it, and the gods, which were "spiritual," ate the "spiritual" animal. Then the people would take the meat and sell it in the meat markets at the heathen temples. That was the place to buy the best steaks in that day -- the filet mignon and the porterhouse and New York cuts.

The Gentiles were not offended by this. They had always bought their meat at these markets, and it was not a matter of conscience for them. However, for the Israelite Christian this would be very offensive. They had been brought up and trained not to eat anything that had been offered to an idol. So the thought here is that the Gentile who invites a Jewish brother over for dinner should not offend him by serving him something that had been offered to idols. So this request was not a matter of putting the Gentiles under Mosaic Law. It was a request that they should not do something which would be very offensive to their Jewish brothers.

They were also requested to abstain from fornication. Again, we need to understand the background to see why this is specifically mentioned. Adultery was so common among the Gentiles in that day that the conscience had been dulled. In fact, adultery was actually part of the religious rite. The Gentiles who had become Christians were to "abstain from fornication."

In America we are going back to paganism today. Folk talk about a new morality. Friend, what they call new morality is old paganism. Our ancestors came out of the forest half naked, eating raw meat, and indulging in gross immorality. There is nothing new about the "new" morality!

Also, the Jerusalem council asked the gentile Christians to abstain from things strangled and from blood, which would be very offensive to their Jewish brothers. This again was a matter of courtesy.

For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him,
being read in the synagogues every sabbath day [[Acts 15:21](#)].

I think we should review what James has said. He fits the church into the program of the prophets although the church is not a subject of prophecy. God is taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name today. Then the program of the prophets will follow.

1. "After this" means after the church is taken out of the world. "I will return" ([v. 16](#)) is the second coming of Christ described in [Revelation 19](#).
 2. He "will build again the ruins" of the house of David that today has fallen down ([v. 16](#)).
 3. When Christ returns, there will be a way for the remainder of men to "seek after the Lord" ([v. 17](#)).
 4. Then all the Gentiles will be in the Kingdom "in that day" ([Amos 9:11](#)).
- The important contrast is between "out of them (Gentiles)" ([v. 14](#)) and "all the Gentiles" ([v. 17](#)).

The Decision Of The Council Is Announced (15:22-35)

Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia [[Acts 15:22-23](#)].

There are some new men mentioned here. Silas will be the partner of Paul on the next journey. Notice the love that is demonstrated in this letter. They wrote to the Gentiles who had turned to God and they called them "the brethren which are of the Gentiles."

Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment [[Acts 15:24](#)].

These people who had gone out, the Judaizers, had no authority from the church in Jerusalem. In fact, we can say that anyone who tries to put a believer under the law today is not doing it on the authority of the Word of God.

It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul [[Acts 15:25](#)].

Isn't this a lovely expression?

Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [[Acts 15:26](#)].

The church sends out men who have been tested, men who have hazarded their lives. Friend, how much have you suffered for Him? What has it cost you? Have you paid a price in order to get out the Word of God?

We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth [[Acts 15:27](#)].

You can see that if they had sent only Barnabas and Paul the people might have said, "Well, of course, these two men would bring back that kind of a report." So they send along Judas and Silas in order to confirm the fact that this was the decision of the council.

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things [[Acts 15:28](#)].

"It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us" -- the Holy Spirit was guiding and directing them in this decision.

That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well [[Acts 15:29](#)].

That is the report. That is all they have to say to them. Gentile believers are not required to meet any of the demands of the Mosaic system, but they are to exercise courtesy to those who do -- especially in the area of meats offered to idols, and of course they are not to commit fornication.

So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation [[Acts 15:30-31](#)].

There is consolation and comfort in the gospel; there is nothing but condemnation in the Law. The Law condemns. The Law is a mirror. When I look in it, I say, "Oh, McGee, you are ugly! You have fallen short of the glory of God." But the gospel says, "Come on to God. He wants to receive you. He will save you by His grace." It is a comfort, you see.

And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still [[Acts 15:32-34](#)].

It is evident that Paul and Silas got along well together. Silas must have liked Paul and enjoyed working with him. So he stayed there at the church in Antioch. He must have been excited about working with these gentile believers. At any rate, he stayed.

Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also [[Acts 15:35](#)].

Paul and Barnabas were actually the pastors of the church there.

Plans For A Second Missionary Journey (15:36-41)

And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do [[Acts 15:36](#)].

Paul had a concern for the churches, a genuine concern for the believers. Knowing how fickle the Galatians were, he thought it would be a good idea to go back again and to visit those churches.

And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark [[Acts 15:37](#)].

We know Barnabas as a very generous, gracious fellow. He is eager to give John Mark another chance. But I want to note that when he has made up his mind, he is hardheaded. Remember that both these men were human. Paul and Barnabas each took a stand and would not budge.

But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work [[Acts 15:38](#)].

Paul had his convictions also. Barnabas wants to take John Mark along, and Paul will not do it. Well, I'm glad these two brethren had this little altercation because it teaches me

that these men were human and that even the saints can disagree without being disagreeable. They didn't break up anything. They did not split the church and form two different churches in Antioch. They just disagreed. It's all right to disagree with some of the brethren.

And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus [[Acts 15:39](#)].

The account does not follow Barnabas any longer. He went to Cyprus and there he had a great ministry. Barnabas had come from Cyprus; it was his home. He had a desire to take the gospel to his own people. We know from tradition that he had a great ministry there, and from Cyprus a great ministry was carried on in North Africa.

At this point Barnabas sails off the pages of the Scriptures. The Bible does not give us information about his ministry. From here on we are going to follow Paul.

And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches [[Acts 15:40-41](#)].

The church now has two great mission projects where before they had only one. Barnabas is going in one direction and Paul is going another. This is God's method. God will use both these men. Paul now has Silas with him, and the brethren recommended them "unto the grace of God."

Chapter 16

THEME: The second missionary journey of Paul

The final verse of chapter 15 actually told of the beginning of the journey. Paul and Silas "went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." From there they will go up into the Galatian country. Paul will visit the Galatian churches because that is where the problem had arisen with the Judaizers. The Epistle to the Galatians is Paul's letter to them, sternly warning them about being led astray by those who are trying to put them under the Mosaic system. It is his strongest declaration and defense of the doctrine of justification by faith. Not only is a sinner saved by grace through faith, but the saved sinner lives by grace. Grace is a way to life and a way of life.

Again let me suggest that you follow Paul's journey on the map. You will find that traveling with Paul is a very thrilling experience. On this second missionary journey we will go with him to Europe (after he has received the vision of the man in Macedonia). We will see that he arrives in Philippi where he ends up in the local jail. At midnight Paul and Silas pray and sing praises! An earthquake shakes the jail, the doors are opened, and the jailer opens his heart to receive Christ as Savior.



PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Picture: Map Of Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Paul Revisits The Churches Of Galatia (16:1-5)

Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:

Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium [[Acts 16:1-2](#)].

Paul first comes to Derbe, then over to Lystra where he finds this young man Timotheus. Paul knew his mother and his grandmother, and he had turned this young man to the Lord on his first trip. So Paul takes him with him. The team is now Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek [[Acts 16:3](#)].

I want to note carefully the method of the apostle Paul. When he went up to Jerusalem, he took along Titus, a Gentile, who wasn't circumcised -- and Paul wasn't about to have him circumcised. However, now Paul wants to take along Timothy as a fellow missionary. He wants Timothy to go out to reach people for Christ. Since he doesn't want any kind of

argument or any reason for offense, he has Timothy circumcised. This is not because there is any merit in circumcision, but because he doesn't want it to be an issue. This is what Paul wrote in [1Corinthians 9:19-20](#): "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law." Paul did this in order to break down all arguments.

Sometimes people come to me and say they want to join a certain church but that church has a different idea of baptism than they hold. They ask if they should be baptized and join the church anyway. So I ask them, "Is the church a good Bible-teaching church? Does it teach salvation only and alone through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it a place where you can serve, and be blessed, and grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth?" If they can answer yes to these questions, then I tell them to go ahead and be baptized and affiliate with that church. There are fundamentals of faith in which there can be no deviation. However, there are forms and rituals which are not essential to salvation, and I believe there is a great deal of elasticity in these areas. This was Paul's feeling. Certainly circumcision had no bearing on Timothy's salvation, but the rite was performed so that the ministry of Timothy with the Jews would not be handicapped.

And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily [[Acts 16:4-5](#)].

Paul has another tremendous ministry in Galatia. Not only does he visit the churches which had been founded the first time, but multitudes in other places turn to Christ. New churches are formed and there is an increase in number daily.

Paul Goes To Philippi (16:6-12)

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia [[Acts 16:6](#)].

Galatia includes all this area. I am of the opinion that Paul moved into the northern part of the country at this particular point. The province of Asia is down south where Ephesus is. In fact, Ephesus was the chief city of the province of Asia. Paul may have been planning to make a circuit through Asia Minor. This was a heavily populated area in that day, and it was really the center of Greek culture. This was a great commercial area, a great political area, a great educational area. Paul would make a great circle by going through the Galatian country, then Phrygia, then south into the province of Asia, and then back again to Antioch to report to the home church.

The Spirit of God had something else in mind. We are told that the Holy Spirit forbade him to preach the Word down in Asia. That is really amazing, isn't it? Paul wanted to go there, and the Spirit of God wanted the Word of God given out, but the Spirit of God wanted Paul in a different place at this time. So Paul naturally thought that if he could not go south, he would go north. Bithynia was in the north, along the Black Sea. That also

was a large population center, and there was a very heavy concentration of Hebrews in that area. This section is in Turkey today.

After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia:
but the Spirit suffered them not [[Acts 16:7](#)].

The Spirit forbade them to go south into the province of Asia. Then the Spirit of God forbade them to go north into Bithynia. He has come from the east. Where will he go? Well, there is only one direction left and that is west. You see, it was not Horace Greeley of The New York Sun who first said, "Go west, young man, go west." Instead it was the Spirit of God speaking to the apostle Paul!

So Paul kept going west until he came to Troas. He had to stop there because from that point he would need a ship to continue. Paul couldn't imagine what he was to do or where he was to go from that point.

And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas [[Acts 16:8](#)].

I think that if we had met Paul during the time of his delay in Troas, we could have asked him, "Paul, where are you going?" I'm sure his reply would have been, "I don't know." I'm afraid our next statement would have been something like this: "Now brother Paul, do you mean that the great Apostle of the Gentiles doesn't know where he is going next? Surely you must know the will of God for your life." Then we would have sat down for a nice long lecture on how to determine the will of God in his life. My, I've read so many books on that subject -- it's too bad Paul didn't have one of those books with him at that time! Paul does not know the will of God. Why? Because the Spirit of God is leading him. Paul is simply waiting. It is going to take a mighty movement to get Paul out of Asia and move him over into Europe.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us [[Acts 16:9](#)].

This is Paul's call into Macedonia. Now Macedonia is across the Aegean Sea, over in Europe. Paul is in Asia. The gospel is going to cross from Asia into Europe. The Spirit of God is moving him in that direction.

I do not know why Paul was not moved east to China. All I know is that the Spirit of God moved him west to Europe. I thank God that this is the direction he went. At that particular time my ancestors, from one side of the family, were roaming in the forests of Germany. They were pagan and they were evil, worshiping all kinds of idols. They were a low, heathen people. The other side of my family came from Scotland, and perhaps my ancestors were already in Scotland at that time or came there a little later. At any rate, I am told they were the dirtiest, filthiest savages that have ever been on the topside of this earth. I thank God the gospel went to Europe to reach my people over there.

Now maybe you are smiling, thinking that your ancestors were very superior to mine. Well, you can wipe that smile off your face because your ancestors probably were living in the cave right next door to mine! They were just as dirty and just as filthy as mine were. Thank God the gospel crossed over into Europe. This was a great and significant crossing.

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them [[Acts 16:10](#)].

Note it says "we endeavoured to go." We have never had "we" before. It has always been "they" or "them" or "he" or "him." What about "we"? Well, Dr. Luke has now joined the party. It is really quite a party now -- in fact, it is a quartet. There may have been others along also, but we have four who are named: Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Dr. Luke. This is quite a delegation that crossed over into Europe.

Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis [[Acts 16:11](#)].

Neapolis is just a little inland from the coast.

And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days [[Acts 16:12](#)].

Philippi was a colony in Macedonia, which means it was a Roman colony. This would be where the Roman governor resided. These people had Roman customs and they spoke Latin. It would be a city where they would "do as the Romans do."

This is their first destination in Europe. Paul went to a strategic center to begin his ministry in Europe. That alone makes the church in Philippi a remarkable church. For other reasons, which we will learn when we get to the Epistle to the Philippians, we will see that this church was close to the heart of Paul. This was the church which loved him; and Paul loved this church. There were wonderful saints in this church, as we shall see.

Paul's Ministry In Philippi (16:13-40)

And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither [[Acts 16:13](#)].

Just outside the city, down by the river, there was a prayer meeting. I wonder whether that prayer meeting had anything to do with Paul coming over to Europe and the vision of the man of Macedonia! We will find that the "man of Macedonia" is a woman by the name of Lydia who was holding this prayer meeting.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul [[Acts 16:14](#)].

Thyatira is over in Asia Minor. It is the place where one of the seven churches was located which received admonition from our Lord in the second chapter of the Book of Revelation. This woman had come from over there. She worshiped the living and true God, but she had very little knowledge.

Lydia was a remarkable person. She was a dominant person and a leader. Apparently she was the leader of the prayer meeting. She will be the first convert to Christ in Europe.

And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us [[Acts 16:15](#)].

We do not know anything about Mr. Lydia, but he must have been around there somewhere. There are families like that, you know, where the woman is the dominant one in the family. Apparently that was the way it was in the family of Lydia. Thank God she was that kind of woman because her entire household turned to God through her witness. And now we find Paul and his group staying at her home and boarding there. I would assume she was a person of means and was able to take care of them.

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying [[Acts 16:16](#)].

Don't think this was just foolish superstition. This girl was possessed by a demon. We are seeing a resurgence of demonism in our own day. I have before me now a letter from a Christian woman in El Paso, Texas. She got tied up in spiritism by just fooling around with it, not thinking that it was dangerous. She has quite a story. It was hearing the Word of God through our radio program that delivered her from it. She cried out to God, and He delivered her. Demonism is a reality. This girl in Paul's day was demon possessed. She was a slave girl and her masters were using her to make a big profit. The Mafia had already begun in those days.

The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers [[Acts 16:17-19](#)].

Paul was able to cast out the demon in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This dried up the profit her masters were making, and you know that if you touch a man's pocketbook, he will begin to move. So now these men really turn against Paul and his group.

And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city.

And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans [[Acts 16:20-21](#)].

Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony and practiced Roman idolatry. Paul and his men were charged with trying to change things. Of course the real issue was that the girl's masters had lost their source of income.

And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely:

Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks [[Acts 16:22-24](#)].

These men are beaten, their backs are lacerated, and they are locked into the stocks.

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them [[Acts 16:25](#)].

What a wonderful thing it is that these men were singing praises unto God while they were in such a miserable situation. No wonder the doors were shaken loose!

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled [[Acts 16:26-27](#)].

Let's look at this Philippian jailer for a moment. He was responsible for those prisoners. He naturally assumed that if the doors were open and the chains lying loose, the prisoners would be gone. He would be responsible for their escape and would have to forfeit his own life. So he stands there, poised, ready to fall on his own sword. When a man is in a position like that, he thinks about eternity. This man did just that, as his question to Paul indicates.

But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? [[Acts 16:28-30](#)].

He had looked into eternity. He knew that he was a lost man.

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house [[Acts 16:31](#)].

How can a man be saved? By believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Could he believe for someone else? No. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and if thy household believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, they shall be saved also. That is the meaning here.

And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway [[Acts 16:32-33](#)].

What a difference! He had put the stripes on these men. Now he washes their stripes. He is a changed man.

And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house [[Acts 16:34](#)].

All in one night they were flogged, thrown into jail, freed by the direct intervention of God, and now they are being royally entertained in the home of these rejoicing young converts!

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let those men go.

And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace [[Acts 16:35-36](#)].

You see, they realize that what they had done was illegal. Now they are issuing orders to free the prisoners and get them out of town. However, Paul objects. He says that he will not leave under such circumstances.

But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out [[Acts 16:37](#)].

Of course Paul's reason for insisting upon a public recognition of their innocence was to protect the new believers whom he would soon be leaving there in Philippi.

And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed [[Acts 16:38-40](#)].

Chapter 17

THEME: The second missionary journey of Paul continued (Paul in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens)

Remarks (17:1)

In this chapter we continue with Paul on his second missionary journey. In chapter 16 we were with him when he crossed over into Europe, a memorable, significant, revolutionary crossing. It brought the gospel to the ancestors of many of us, who were by no means a superior people. Actually, God chooses the weak things of this world just to let the world

know that it is all because of His sovereign grace and not because of merit. We thank Him for sending the gospel over into Europe.

We went with Paul first to Philippi where he received some rough treatment. Yet, a little church came into existence in that town. When we study the epistle to that church, we will find that it was closer to the apostle Paul than any other church or any other group of believers.

Now he continues on his journey. I hope you will follow this on the map. You will notice that he goes to Thessalonica and Berea, still traveling westward into Macedonia, then south to Athens. Thessalonica will be his next significant stop for missionary activity.

Paul's Ministry In Thessalonica (17:1-9)

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews [[Acts 17:1](#)].

As we have noted before, Paul used the synagogue as a springboard to get into a city or a community. This would lead him to the devout Jews of the city, and some of those Jews would believe. Never did all of them believe, but some of them did. In fact, most of them would reject him, and this would push him right out to the Gentiles. Then some of the Gentiles believed. This is how a church would come into existence, a local church composed of Jews and Gentiles.

Amphipolis was also called "Nine Ways," which suggests its importance both strategically and commercially. Most cities are built on the pattern of a square, but this was like a roundhouse, and the wall around it was round. It was an important station on the Via Egnatia, a Roman road which was the prominent thoroughfare through that area. It was five hundred miles from the Hellespont to Dyrrhachium on the Adriatic by this road. This would be the highway which the Roman army would use. This was the route the traders would travel. And now here come some missionaries on this road going to Thessalonica. Apollonia was another town on this same Egnatian Road.

Thessalonica was thirty-eight miles west of Apollonia on the Egnatian Road. It was inland but it was a seaport because three rivers flowed into the sea from there. It was a prominent city of that day, another Roman colony. Cassander rebuilt it in about 315 B.C. and it is thought that he named it after Thessalonica, the stepsister of Alexander the Great. There are some warm springs there and the earlier name of the town was Therma or Therme. Cassander was one of the generals of Alexander the Great, and he took over the rule of that area after the death of Alexander. At the time of Paul, however, the city was a Roman colony.

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ [[Acts 17:2-3](#)].

Paul followed his usual custom of first preaching in the synagogue. He was there only three Sabbaths, which means that he could not have been there longer than a month. In that limited period of time he did his missionary work. Believers came to Christ, a local church was organized, and Paul taught them. In that brief time he taught them all the great doctrines of Scripture, including the doctrine of the Rapture of the church -- we know this from his First Epistle to the Thessalonians which was the first Epistle that Paul wrote. Paul had quite a ministry there in one month's time!

Now note his message. He was "opening and alleging" -- that is, from the Old Testament Scriptures -- "that Christ must needs have suffered." He preached the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, showing that this was necessary, as set forth in the Old Testament. Friend, you will not find a message given in the Book of Acts either by Peter or by Paul in which the Resurrection is not the heart of the message.

Today we find so often that the Resurrection just doesn't seem to be the heart of the message. What we talk about today is the Cross -- even in fundamental circles. But, my friend, we have a living Christ today. Someone has put it this way: "There is a Man in the glory but the church has lost sight of Him." The Lord Jesus Christ is yonder at God's right hand at this very moment. That is very important. It is one thing to talk about the historical death of Christ nineteen hundred years ago and His resurrection on the third day, but the question is: How are you related to it? That was Paul's great theme in the Galatian epistle. Is it meaningful to you that Christ died and that He rose again? Are you related today to that living Christ? How has this been meshed and geared into your life?

Today we have conservatism in the church and we have liberalism in the church and, very candidly, neither group seems to be getting through to Him. Why not? Well, because every Sunday should be an Easter -- on the first day of the week He came back from the dead! It is important to mention the resurrection of Christ because we are talking about the Man in the glory.

Unfortunately, that just doesn't seem to be the emphasis. Pastors don't emphasize it because seminaries don't emphasize it. Take down any theology book and study it -- Strong's, Shedd's, Thornwall's, Hodge's, and you will find that all of them have a long section on the death of Christ. That's very important; thank God they have a long section on that. But they have a short section, just a few pages, on the Resurrection. I think they missed the boat there. I think they should have put in a long section about the resurrection of Christ. That was the basis of New Testament preaching. I'm emphasizing this because it is very important. Paul was in Thessalonica only three Sabbath days, and the resurrection of Christ was his message.

Notice their reception of Him.

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few [[Acts 17:4](#)].

Some of them believed. That always happens when you give out the Word of God. Some of them believe. Also some of them won't believe. The minority believe; the majority will not.

When Dr. Luke says "of the chief women not a few," he is using his usual understatement and means that a large number of prominent women came to the Lord. How wonderful!

But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people [[Acts 17:5](#)].

Unfortunately, we also have some "lewd fellows of the baser sort" in our churches today.

And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also [[Acts 17:6](#)].

Now don't put that down as an oratorical gesture or hyperbole. When they said that these men were turning the world upside down, that is exactly what they meant. When Christianity penetrated that old Roman Empire it was a revolution. It had a tremendous effect.

Today we don't see much revolution except in the wrong direction. It's too bad we can't have a great revolution of turning back to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Word of God. Our country is a country filled with hypocrisy. We pretend that we are a Christian nation. We pretend that our leaders are Christian, that all the politicians are Christians, that everyone is a Christian. Friend, we are one of the most pagan nations this world has ever known. Christianity today is mostly a pretense. We need to recognize that we need to get back to the Word of God and to the living Christ. How important that is!

Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go [[Acts 17:7-9](#)].

Remember that this was a Roman colony, which was operated according to Caesar's dictates. "They had taken security of Jason" means that he had to make bond.

Paul's Ministry At Berea (17:10-14)

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews [[Acts 17:10](#)].

You would think that all this would dampen the enthusiasm of Paul, that it would slow him down. It didn't slow him down one bit; he is still going. He goes to Berea, which is a town down closer to the coast.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so [[Acts 17:11](#)].

These people were reasonable. They searched the Scriptures, and there came into existence a church in Berea. We don't hear much about that church. It is interesting that the strongest churches arose where the persecution was the greatest. One of the troubles today is that the church is not being persecuted. In fact, the church is just taken for granted. The average Christian is just a person to be taken for granted. It wasn't that way in the first century.

Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few [[Acts 17:12](#)].

Here goes Dr. Luke again with his diminutive "not a few." Why doesn't he say a great crowd of men and honorable women believed? When he says, "Not a few," he means it was a multitude.

But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still [[Acts 17:13-14](#)].

Paul continues on his way without the other members of his team.

Paul's Ministry At Athens (17:15-34)

And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed [[Acts 17:15](#)].

Paul goes to Athens. He will wait for Silas and Timotheus there. He probably had said to them, "You go back to check on the believers in Thessalonica and see how the church is progressing there, and check on the believers in Berea; then join me in Athens."

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry [[Acts 17:16](#)].

Athens was the cultural center of the world. In fact, when one thinks of Athens, one thinks about culture. Yet it was a city filled with idolatry.

Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him [[Acts 17:17](#)].

When I was in Athens, I went down to that market. It is right at the foot of the Acropolis. I can imagine Paul walking up and down there. He was a tentmaker, you know, and I think he sold a few tents while he was there. While he was selling the tents, he was talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. The people began to get interested.

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection [[Acts 17:18](#)].

The philosophy of the Epicureans was more or less hedonistic. The Stoics, a group who believed in restraint, were what we today call stoical. The Epicureans believed that you go the limit, and in that way you could overcome the flesh. They thought that you should give the flesh all that it wants. If it wants liquor, drink all you can hold. Concerning sex, believe me, the Epicureans could really join in the "new morality," which was nothing new for them. By contrast, the Stoics believed that the body should be held under control.

Philosophers of both groups come to Paul to hear what he has to say. Paul has been doing a lot of talking and they call him a babbler. His subject is something new to them. Jesus and the idea of resurrection are to them "strange gods."

I hear people say today that Paul got his idea from Platonism. They say he didn't really believe in the bodily resurrection but in a platonic idea of a spiritual resurrection. It was more or less the influence of an individual permeating through society. This is the life after death. One still hears that type of thing today. It is found in liberalism, and it is nothing in the world but old Greek philosophy. But these Greeks, philosophers as they were, didn't quite understand Paul. I think Paul was a little too deep for them. Philosophy had gone to seed in Athens at this particular time. However, they wanted to hear him.

And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? [[Acts 17:19](#)].

The Areopagus is a very peculiar formation of rock on top of which the Parthenon and the buildings connected with it stand. Frankly, it is a very lovely setting, beautiful buildings and beautiful statues, but a city wholly given over to idolatry. It is up from the market place of the city and Paul is brought there to speak. Probably every preacher who visits there reads Paul's sermon from the top of Mars' Hill. When I was there another preacher began to read it, and since I didn't like the way he was reading it, I went way over to the other side of the rock. I sat with my Bible and read it silently. It was a thrilling experience.

Now these Greek philosophers say to him, "May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest is?" They want to know more about it. They are completely in the dark. They are worse off than the Galatians or the people in Philippi and Thessalonica. Why? Because they think they know something. The very hardest people in the world to reach with the Word of God and the gospel are church members because they think they don't need it. They think the gospel is for the man on skid row and for some of their friends. Some church members can be mean and sinful and yet not recognize they really need a Savior, not only to save them from sin, but also to make their lives count for God.

For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) [[Acts 17:20-21](#)].

In this same way America is going to seed today. Have you ever listened to the talk shows? They are boring to tears. Everyone is trying to come up with something new.

Each one is trying to say something novel. They try so hard to say something smart, something sophisticated; yet it is the same old story. Athens tried the same thing.

There must have been quite a bunch of loafers back in Athens. They didn't work -- they didn't do anything. They just talked, propounding new theories and new ideas. The human family seems to reach that place of sophistication. They think they know something when they don't. They don't know the most important fact in the whole universe.

There are those who say that Paul failed on Mars' Hill, that he fell flat on his face at Athens. I totally disagree with that. I believe this was one of the greatest messages that Paul ever preached.

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious [[Acts 17:22](#)].

He begins his message quite formally, "Ye men of Athens." Then he says, "I perceive . . . ye are too superstitious." The word superstitious is wholly inadequate to say what Paul really means. He is saying that he perceives they are in all things too religious. The Athenians were very religious. Athens was filled with idols. There was no end to the pantheon of the Athenians and the Greeks. There were gods small and gods great; they had a god for practically everything. That is what Paul is saying. They were too religious.

I sometimes hear people ask, "Why should we send missionaries to foreign countries? Those people have their religion." I suppose that when Paul went down to Athens, somebody said, "Why are you going down there? They have religion." I am sure Paul would have answered, "That's their problem; they have too much religion." A preacher friend of mine said many years ago, "When I came to Christ, I lost my religion." There are a great many folk in our churches today who need to lose their religion so they can find Christ. That is the great problem. Some folk say, "People are too bad to be saved." The real problem is that people are too good to be saved. They think they are religious and worthy and good. My friend, we are to take the gospel to all because all men are lost with Christ, which is the reason Paul went to Athens. The Athenians needed to hear the message of the gospel.

Notice that in Athens Paul did not go to a synagogue. He had no springboard in Athens. He begins his masterly address to "Ye men of Athens." After he makes the observation that they are too religious, he continues:

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you [[Acts 17:23](#)].

"I . . . beheld your devotions." He saw their objects of worship. He noted their altars and their idols and their temples. In fact, that very beautiful temple called the Parthenon was a temple built to Athena, the virgin goddess of the Athenians. There were idols all around. Paul said, "I observed all of this, and amidst the idols I found an altar inscribed to the unknown god."

Now an altar to an unknown god could mean that the Athenians were broad-minded. They didn't want to leave anyone out. If someone had come to Athens and said, "How is it you don't have an altar to my god?" they would have answered, "Well, this altar is really to your god." That way any stranger could come to worship at the altar to the unknown god, believing it was built for his god.

Or it could mean that they recognized there was a God whom they did not know. Many pagan folk recognize that behind their idolatry is a living and true God. They know nothing about Him, and they do not know how to approach Him. They have traditions that back in the dim and distant past their ancestors did worship Him. This could have been the case with the Athenians.

Paul uses this as the springboard for his message. He says he wants to talk to them about this unknown God. He says he wants to tell them about the God whom they don't know. Perhaps that is not as diplomatic as his first approach. After all, the Athenians thought they knew everything. This crowd of philosophers met in Athens and talked back and forth, as philosophers do on college campuses today. And now Paul begins to talk to them about the God they do not know. Who is He? Well, first of all, He is the God of creation.

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands [[Acts 17:24](#)].

God had made very clear all the way through the Old Testament -- even when He gave to Israel the pattern for the tabernacle and the temple -- that He did not dwell in one geographical spot. Solomon acknowledged this in his prayer at the dedication of the temple: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" ([1Kings 8:27](#)). These men in the Old Testament recognized that God the Creator, the living God, could not live in a building that had been made by man. Man lives in a universe that God has made. Why does man get the idea that he can build a building for God to live in?

Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things [[Acts 17:25](#)].

Here is a masterly stroke by Paul. He tells them, "God doesn't need anything from you. You built an altar to Him; you bring offerings to feed Him" -- they wanted this unknown God to know that they were thinking of Him. Now Paul says, "God doesn't need anything from you! God is on the giving end. He gives you life. He gives you your breath. He has given you the sun, the moon, and the stars. He has given you all things." These Athenians worshiped the sun. They said that Apollo came dragging his chariot across the sky every day. Paul says that the sun is something that God has made, and it is a gift for you. The Creator is the living God. He is the One who has given you everything. By the way, He gives you salvation also. He not only gives you physical things but also gives you spiritual gifts.

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation [[Acts 17:26](#)].

So much has been made of this "one blood" business that I think we need to dissipate any wrong notions here. A better translation is, "He made from one every nation of mankind." God has made one humanity. This verse is not talking about brotherhood. The only brotherhood which Scripture knows is the brotherhood of those who are in Christ Jesus. Perhaps I should amend that by saying there is a brotherhood of sin. We all are sinners. Paul's statement that God "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" is fascinating.

Not only is He the God who created the universe and who created human beings, but it is interesting to note that he also put them in certain geographical locations.

My doctor is a cancer specialist, and he has told me to stay out of the sun here in California because I am a blond. There seems to be even a medical reason why God put the darker races where the sun shines and put the light-skinned races up north where there is not so much sun. So some of us who are blond and light-skinned need to be very careful about too much exposure to the sun. God is the One who has determined the geographical locations for His creatures. I guess some of my ancestors should have stayed where they belonged. Maybe I'm kind of out of place here in California, but I'm glad to be here and I try to be careful about protecting myself from too much sunshine. Now that is just a little sideline as an illustration.

God has put nations in certain places. It is interesting that the thing that has produced the wars of the past is that nations don't want to stay where they belong; they want someone else's territory. That has been the ultimate cause for every war that has ever been fought.

That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us [[Acts 17:27](#)].

This phrase "feel after him" has the idea of groping after Him. Man is not really searching for the living and true God, but he is searching for a god. He is willing to put up an idol and worship it. Man is not necessarily looking for the living and true God, but he is on a search.

For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring [[Acts 17:28](#)].

He does not call them sons of God but the offspring of God. He is referring to creation and the relationship to God through creation. By the way, this is not pantheism that he is stating here. He is not saying that everything is God. He says that in God we live and move and have our being but that God is beyond this created universe.

Paul quotes to them from their own poets. One of the poets he quoted was Arastus who lived about 270 B.C. He was a Stoic from Cilicia. He began a poem with an invocation to Zeus in which he said that "we too are his offspring." Cleanthes was another poet who

lived about 300 B.C. He also wrote a hymn to Zeus and speaks of the fact that "we are his offspring." Paul means, of course, that we are God's creatures.

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device [[Acts 17:29](#)].

In other words, he says we ought not to be idolaters. He has shown God to be the Creator. Now he will present Him as the Redeemer.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent [[Acts 17:30](#)].

There was a time when God shut His eyes to paganism. Now light has come into the world. God asks men everywhere to turn to Him. Light creates responsibility. Now God is commanding all men everywhere to repent.

He has presented God as the Creator in His past work. He shows God as the Redeemer in His present work. Now he shows God as the Judge in His future work.

Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead [[Acts 17:31](#)].

When God judges, it will be right. Judgment will be through a Judge who has nail-pierced hands, the One who has been raised from the dead. Paul always presents the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a declaration to all men. It is by this that God assures all men there will be a judgment.

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter [[Acts 17:32](#)].

Do you know why they mocked? Because Platonism denied the resurrection of the dead. That was one of the marks of Platonism. It denied the physical resurrection. When you hear people today talking about a spiritual resurrection but denying the physical resurrection, you are hearing Platonic philosophy rather than scriptural teaching. Paul taught the physical resurrection from the dead. So when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.

So Paul departed from among them [[Acts 17:33](#)].

Some critics have said that Paul failed at Athens. He didn't fail, friend. There will always be those who mock at the gospel. But there will also be those who believe.

Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them [[Acts 17:34](#)].

There was quite an aggregation of converts in the city of Athens. When Paul went to a place and preached the gospel, he had converts. He didn't fail. He succeeded. Wherever the Word of God is preached, there will be those who will listen and believe.

Chapter 18

THEME: The second missionary journey of Paul continued (Paul in Corinth; Apollos in Ephesus)

We are still on the second missionary journey of Paul. He is in Athens alone waiting for Timothy and Silas to come and join him and to bring reports from the churches in Berea and in Thessalonica. After his missionary thrust in Athens Paul goes on his journey to Corinth.

The Ministry Of Paul At Corinth (18:1-17)

[After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth \[Acts 18:1\].](#)

I have made the trip from Athens to Corinth by bus. Paul probably walked it. It would take a long time to walk that distance although it would be a beautiful walk. I enjoyed the scenery more since I was riding than I would have if I had been walking, I assure you. It goes past the site where the Battle of Salamis was fought at sea. This is where the Persian fleet was destroyed. There are other historical places along that way before you arrive at Corinth.

In our study of the Epistle to the Corinthians, we will see the reason Paul wrote as he did to the believers at Corinth.

For now let me say that the city of Corinth was probably the most wicked city of that day. It was the Hollywood and the Las Vegas of the Roman Empire. It was the place where you could go to live it up. Sex and drink and all other sensual pleasures were there. In Corinth today one can see the remains of a great Roman bath. That is where they went to sober up. In the distance is the temple that was dedicated to Aphrodite (or Venus) in which there were a thousand so-called vestal virgins. They were anything but virgins; they were prostitutes -- sex was a religion. Corinth was one of the most wicked cities of the day. Also there were two tremendous theatres there. People came from all over the empire to the city of Corinth.

Paul came to Corinth on his second missionary journey and again on his third journey. I believe it was here where Paul had one of his most effective ministries. It is my judgment that in Corinth and Ephesus Paul had his greatest ministries. Ephesus was a religious center; Corinth was a sin center. Both cities were great commercial centers.

Now notice what Paul does on his first visit to Corinth.

[And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; \(because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:\) and came unto them \[Acts 18:2\].](#)

In the city of Corinth he found this Jewish couple, recently come from Rome. The reason they left Rome was because of anti-Semitism which had rolled like a wave over the earth. During the days of the Roman Empire this happened several times. At this time Claudius

commanded all Jews to leave Rome. Among those who got out of Rome was a very wonderful couple, Aquila and Priscilla.

And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers [[Acts 18:3](#)].

Aquila had come there because they were in business. They opened up their shop, and one day there came to their shop a little Jew who had traveled all the way from Antioch. They got acquainted and they invited Paul to stay with them.

What do you suppose they talked about? Well, Paul led them to the Lord. In the synagogue there were others who also turned to the Lord. However, there was also great opposition against Paul among the Jews.

And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ [[Acts 18:4-5](#)].

Paul had waited in Athens for Timothy and Silas to come, but they didn't show up. Now they come to him in Corinth and bring the report from the churches in Macedonia. When we get to the first Thessalonian Epistle, we will find that Paul wrote it during this period, after he had received Timothy's report.

Now he feels that he must speak out, and he testifies that Jesus is the Messiah.

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles [[Acts 18:6](#)].

Apparently it was at this time that Paul made the break that took him to the gentile world. It would seem that from this point Paul's ministry was largely to the Gentiles. We will find that true in Ephesus and less obviously in Rome.

And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized [[Acts 18:7-8](#)].

Paul spent about eighteen months in the city of Corinth where he had a tremendous ministry. When the Jews oppose him, he turns to the Gentiles. We find now that the Lord speaks to Paul because he is coming into a great new dimension of his missionary endeavor.

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city [[Acts 18:9-10](#)].

Corinth was about the last place that you would expect the Lord to "have much people." I have been through Las Vegas quite a few times. I'll be honest with you -- when I look at that crowd, I wouldn't get the impression that the Lord might have people there. If the Lord were to say to me, "I have much people in this city," I wouldn't question the Lord, but it surely would be the opposite from my own impression.

Paul had already been in Corinth for quite a while, and I am sure that he was wondering about that city. I'm of the opinion that when he received this opposition, he was ready to leave and go somewhere else. However, the Lord Himself steps in and detains Paul. He tells him, "I have much people in this city."

And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them [[Acts 18:11](#)].

After Paul has had several months of ministry in Corinth, again opposition will arise.

And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat [[Acts 18:12](#)].

This "judgment seat" is the Bema seat. It is the Bema that Paul talks about in the Epistle to the Corinthians. I have been there and I have sat on the ruins of the Bema seat in Corinth. They brought Paul to the Bema seat, the judgment seat, and there they brought the charge against him.

Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law [[Acts 18:13](#)].

They didn't mean contrary to the law of the Roman Empire or contrary to the law of Corinth. They meant contrary to the law of the Mosaic system.

And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:

But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.

And he drave them from the judgment seat.

Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things [[Acts 18:14-17](#)].

I have read and heard Bible expositors condemn this man Gallio in no uncertain terms. He is pictured as an unfeeling typical judge of that day. I want to say something for the defense of Gallio. I thank God for him, and I personally think that he took the right position. I'll tell you what I mean by that. He is probably the first person who made a decision between church and state. Gallio said that if the matter was concerning religion or about some religious thing, then they should take it and handle it themselves. He was a

Roman magistrate and he was concerned with enforcing Roman law. But when the case did not involve Roman law, he would not interfere. He told them to handle religious matters themselves. He adopted a "hands off" policy. I like Gallio. He separated church and state. He would not interfere with Paul preaching in the city of Corinth. Corinth was a city of freedom, including religious freedom. Since the issue had to do with religion, he asked them to settle it themselves.

Now I want to say this: I wish the Supreme Court of the United States would adopt the same policy. I wish they would adopt a "hands off" policy when it comes to matters of religion. What right does a group of secular men have to come along and make a decision that you can't have prayer in the schools? If a community wants prayer in their school, then they should have prayer in their school. If they are not having prayer in school, then the state should not force prayer in school. We claim to have freedom of speech and freedom of religion in our land. The unfortunate thing is that our freedoms are often curtailed. They are abused and misdirected. Under the guise of separating church and state, the freedom of religion is actually curtailed. If we are going to separate church and state, then the state should keep its nose out of that which refers to the church.

If this man Gallio were running for office, I would vote for him. I think we need men with this kind of vision. It says Gallio cared for none of those things. Of course not! He is a secular magistrate. He is not going to try to settle an argument about differences in doctrine. That's not his business, and he'll stay out of it. I would vote for him.

Paul Sails For Antioch (18:18-23)

And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow [[Acts 18:18](#)].

There are a great many folk who find fault with Paul because he made a vow. They say that this is a man who preached that we are not under law but we are under grace, and so he should not have made a vow. Anyone who says this about Paul is actually making a little law for Paul. Such folk are saying that Paul is to do things their way. Under grace, friend, if you want to make a vow, you can make it. And if you do not want to make a vow, you don't have to. Paul didn't force anyone else to make a vow. In fact, he said emphatically that no one has to do that. But if Paul wants to make a vow, that is his business. That is the marvelous freedom that we have in the grace of God today.

There are some super-saints who form little cliques and make laws for the Christian. They say we can't do this and we can't do that. May I say to you very candidly that our relationship is to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is a love affair. If we love Him, of course we will not do anything that will break our fellowship with Him. Don't insist that I go through your little wicket gate; I am to follow Him. He shows me what I can and cannot do in order to maintain fellowship with Him.

If one wishes to eat meat, there is freedom to eat meat. If one wishes to observe a certain day, there is freedom to observe it. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" ([1Cor. 10:31](#)). The important thing is to do all to the glory

of God. Eating meat will not commend you to God and neither will abstaining from meat commend you to God.

Let's not find fault with Paul here. Poor Gallio and Paul surely do get in trouble with their critics right in this particular passage. I want to defend both of them.

Paul is now returning from his second missionary journey and now he is going back to Antioch. He sails from Cenchrea, which is the seaport over on the east side. There is a canal through the Corinthian peninsula today, but there was none in that day. They would actually pull the boats overland. I have a picture taken to show the rocks that are worn by the boats which were pulled over the isthmus to the other side. Cenchrea was the port of Corinth on the eastward side. Paul goes there with Aquila and Priscilla, and they take ship there. He is not going westward any farther; he is sailing for home.

And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews [[Acts 18:19](#)].

You remember that when he came out on this second journey, the Spirit of God would not allow him to come down to Ephesus. Now, on his way back, he stops at Ephesus, but he does not stay there very long.

When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus [[Acts 18:20-21](#)].

Again someone may ask what business Paul has in keeping feasts. Remember his background. He is a Jew like Simon Peter. He has the background of the Mosaic system. He knows a lot of his friends will be in Jerusalem for the feast. He wants to go up to witness to them. He feels that he must by all means keep this feast that is coming in Jerusalem. He is under grace. If he wants to do that, that is his business.

However, he did see that there was a great door open in Ephesus. He has the heart of a missionary, and he wants to return to them. Ephesus was one of the great cities of the Roman Empire.

And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch [[Acts 18:22](#)].

He landed at Caesarea. Caesarea and Joppa were the ports from which one could go up to Jerusalem. He went to Jerusalem and gave his report there. Then he went back up north to his home church, which was in Antioch. This concludes the second missionary journey of Paul.

Notice that it isn't long before he starts out on his third journey.

And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples [[Acts 18:23](#)].

This is now his third trip through the Galatian country. We will find that he will go to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. He is going to have a great ministry there. But right now someone else has come into Ephesus. He is Apollos, another great preacher in the early church. He is not as well known as Paul, but we can learn a great deal about him.

Apollos In Ephesus (18:24-28)

And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus [[Acts 18:24](#)].

Apollos was a Jew, which meant he had the background of the Mosaic Law. His name, Apollos, is Greek. So he was a Hellenist of the Diaspora. He hadn't been born in Greece or in that area of Macedonia; he was born at Alexandria in North Africa. Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great, was one of the great centers of Greek culture. A great university was there and it had one of the finest libraries in the world. It was there that a Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, was made. There was a Jewish temple in Alexandria. The great center of the early church moved from Jerusalem and Antioch to Alexandria, and it remained important for several centuries of early church history. Athanasius, Tertullian, and Augustine, three great men of the early church, came from there. Philo, a contemporary of Apollos, mingled Greek philosophy with Judaism. This combined Platonism and Judaism. Apollos was obviously influenced by this background.

We are told that he was "an eloquent man," a great preacher. Also he was "mighty in the scriptures," which means he was well trained in the Old Testament.

This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John [[Acts 18:25](#)].

That he had been "instructed in the way of the Lord" means he had an education by word of mouth not by revelation. And he was "fervent in the spirit" -- not the Holy Spirit. He had a passion for the things of God. This is the Holy Spirit's testimony about him. Frankly, friend, he was a great man, an outstanding man.

Apollos spoke and taught "diligently the things of the Lord." He taught everything that he had learned, but he knew only about the baptism of John. He couldn't go any further than that. He had not heard of Jesus.

And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly [[Acts 18:26](#)].

They invited Apollos home for dinner after the service. They realized that his information was very limited; so they told him about Jesus.

And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace [[Acts 18:27](#)].

Apollos was a brilliant man, but up until the time Aquila and Priscilla took him home for dinner, he didn't know the gospel of the grace of God. Here is a case where a woman helped a preacher a great deal. She taught him something that he didn't know.

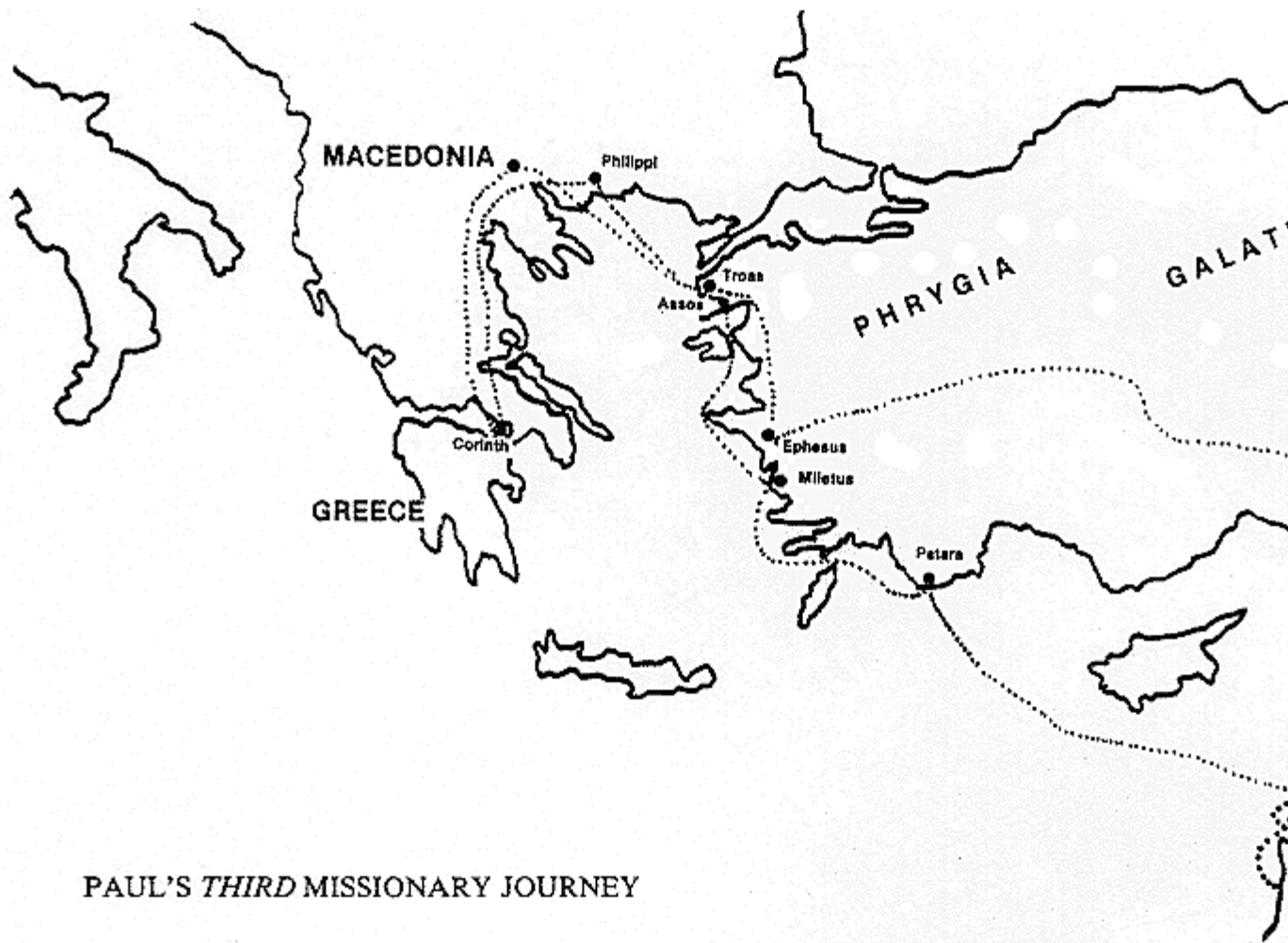
For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ [[Acts 18:28](#)].

"He mightily convinced" the Jews, showing them by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. He had taught zealously the things of the Old Testament up through the ministry of John the Baptist. He knew nothing beyond the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla had the privilege of bringing him up to date and also to conversion. He then went to Achaia, visiting the churches in Greece, including Corinth and Athens, preaching Jesus as the Messiah and Savior.

Chapter 19

THEME: Third missionary journey of Paul (Paul in Ephesus)

Paul's third missionary journey began in the previous chapter at [verse 23](#) when he left Antioch. In this chapter he retraces part of his first and second missionary journeys. Then he comes to Ephesus, where he speaks daily in the school of Tyrannus for two years. Paul performs miracles which lead to the march against him led by Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths. The move is quieted by the town clerk who urges them to appeal to the law rather than resorting to violence.



PAUL'S *THIRD* MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Picture: Map Of Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Paul's Ministry In Ephesus (19:1-41)

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost [[Acts 19:1-2](#)].

You will remember that Paul had come through Ephesus on his return trip from his second missionary journey and had told them that he would come back to them if God so willed. He had not stayed in Ephesus previously and had had no ministry there. Now he returns to Ephesus, but he has been preceded there by that great preacher, Apollos. You recall that Apollos did not know anything about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ until Aquila and Priscilla had talked to him. All he had been preaching was the baptism of John, which was as far as his knowledge went. As a result of this, the people who had heard his preaching had been instructed only as far as the baptism of John and had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul detected that.

"Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" is a poor translation. Both verbs receive and believe, are in the same tense. The American Standard Version translates the verse more accurately: "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" Paul is asking them, "When you believed, did you receive the Holy Spirit?" Their response was that they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit. They had been instructed up to the baptism of John. They had not been taught about the Lord Jesus and didn't know anything about Pentecost.

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism [[Acts 19:3](#)].

You see that these people were baptized, but they were not saved. They had not received the Holy Spirit because they were not saved. Friend, the moment you trust Christ you are regenerated by the Spirit of God, you are indwelt by the Spirit of God, you are sealed by the Spirit of God, and you are baptized into the body of believers by the Spirit of God. This happens the moment you believe and trust Christ. Paul detected that this had not happened to these people. Now Paul explains to them that they must trust the Lord Jesus to be saved. They respond to his message and many believe.

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Jesus Christ.

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ [[Acts 19:4-5](#)].

The baptism of John was a "baptism of repentance." It was a preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the people turn to Christ and are saved. They did not get saved under Apollos because he didn't even know about Christ when he preached to them. Some people interpret this passage to mean that they had been saved, and then later when Paul came they received the Holy Spirit. That is not true, as you can see.

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

And all the men were about twelve [[Acts 19:6-7](#)].

These men could now speak the gospel in other languages -- in tongues that could be understood. Ephesus was a polyglot city of the Roman Empire. There were many languages spoken there, just as there had been in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. East and West met all along that coast. It was a great city of that day. These men were now able to give the good news of Christ to the entire city.

Notice there were twelve men. This was the beginning of the ministry at Ephesus. Paul had a great ministry in Corinth and an even greater ministry in Ephesus.

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and

separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks [[Acts 19:8-10](#)].

Paul had to leave the synagogue because there was a great deal of opposition to him. He moved his place of operation and did his speaking daily in the school of Tyrannus.

What was this school of Tyrannus? Well, it was a school that was conducted for the Ephesians. They had a siesta in the middle of the day, probably for two or three hours. Paul, I imagine, rented the space and at siesta time, in the middle of the day, he preached the Word of God for a period of two years. As a result, the whole province of Asia heard the Word of God, both the Jews and the Greeks.

This gives us some concept of how the Word of God was growing in that day. Apparently from this vantage point the church in Colosse came into existence. You see, Paul wrote to the Colossians as he did to the Romans before he had visited them. Yet he was the founder of those churches. How could this be? By the simple fact that from the school of Tyrannus the gospel sounded forth -- it went out everywhere. When the Corinthians wanted Paul to come over to them, he wrote to them, "For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit. But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" ([1Cor. 16:7-9](#)). For two years the gospel sounded out so that everyone in the province of Asia had heard it. Probably the seven churches of Asia Minor came into existence through the preaching of Paul the apostle here at Ephesus. This may have been where he had his greatest ministry.

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul [[Acts 19:11](#)]

There are different words used in the Greek which our Bible translates as "miracles." Here the word for "miracle" is dunamis from which we get our word dynamite. It means "an act of power." God wrought special powers by the hands of Paul. He is exercising the gifts of an apostle.

This was a great religious center, possibly more than Athens or any other place. The great temple of Diana was there, and the worship connected with it was satanic to the very core. Now in order to meet that kind of opposition, God granted some special powers to Paul.

So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them [[Acts 19:12](#)].

What were these handkerchiefs and aprons which are mentioned here? Well, actually we could call them sweat cloths. Paul used them as he worked. Remember that he was a tentmaker and this was in a warm climate. While he was working, he would be perspiring. He would use these cloths, these handkerchiefs and aprons, to wipe his brow. They were dirty. They had perspiration from his body on them. People would come and

pick up these dirty cloths and would be healed of their diseases! In that area there were the mystery religions which used white garments and emphasized that everything must be very clean and white. Everything had to be just so. It seems that God was rebuking all of that sort of thing. He used these dirty sweaty cloths to heal people.

This reveals the special power that was granted to the apostle Paul. As far as I know, this is the only incident like this that ever took place -- including the day in which we live. It is almost blasphemous for anyone to send out a little handkerchief and claim there is a power in it. Paul's handkerchief was an old sweat cloth. God used that to rebuke the heathen, pagan religions of that day. Diseases were healed and evil spirits went out of them when they picked up these dirty, sweaty cloths.

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth [[Acts 19:13](#)].

When they saw what Paul did, they tried to duplicate it. Now a specific incident will be related.

And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? [[Acts 19:14-15](#)].

Notice that these were priests. The priests had actually gone into this type of thing. The Greek word here for "know" is ginosko. It does not imply a knowledge by faith. It means simply that the evil spirit knows who Jesus is.

And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded [[Acts 19:16](#)].

The attempt of the sons of Sceva to try to duplicate the miracles of Paul backfired. It backfired to their humiliation and hurt and apparently was a great embarrassment for them.

And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified [[Acts 19:17](#)].

You can see the effect that this had. It caused the name of the Lord Jesus to be spread through that entire pagan city. Ephesus was a great city, and it was shaken by this.

The miracles which Paul and the other apostles performed were not the type of thing that one hears about today. For many years there have been stories of miracles being performed in Los Angeles and in Southern California, but they made no dent or impression on this great pagan city. The miracles of Paul shook Ephesus to its very foundation. The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified through them.

And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.

Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver [[Acts 19:18-19](#)].

That would be about \$8,000.00 U.S. currency before inflation. That is quite a bonfire, by the way, an \$8,000.00 bonfire! That's what they had in Ephesus.

So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome [[Acts 19:20-21](#)].

"After these things were ended" -- that is, these experiences which Dr. Luke has recorded here -- it apparently was Paul's intention to go to Rome on this missionary journey. The interesting thing is that he did go to Rome, but not the way he had planned to go.

So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season [[Acts 19:22](#)].

This is the time that he wrote Corinthians. Apparently Timothy and Erastus took the letter to deliver it. Although it was addressed to the Corinthians, the letter would reach the people in Macedonia, which would include Philippi and Thessalonica, and also the churches in Achaia, which would include Athens and Corinth. It was in this letter that Paul wrote that a great and effectual door was open for him in Ephesus but that there were many adversaries. We can see now that the adversaries were satanic. This was a center of pagan religion and of Satan worship. The Satan worship we see today is not something new at all.

And the same time there arose no small stir about that way [[Acts 19:23](#)].

Christianity had no name for the churches at that time -- certainly no denominational name. It was simply called "that way." It was a new way, that is certain. The way was the Lord Jesus who Himself said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" ([John 14:6](#)).

For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen [[Acts 19:24](#)].

The temple of Diana was a great pagan temple, and it was the center of business. It was the bank of that day. It was also the center of sin. Gross immorality took place around it. It is true that religion can go to a lower level than anything else. That temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the largest Greek temple that was ever built. It was beautiful and it was adorned with works of art, but the image of Diana or Artemis was hideous. It was not the Diana of the Greeks, a graceful image, but was the crude, many-breasted, oriental Diana. They were selling those silver images, and it was big business. Paul's ministry was interfering with it.

Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth [[Acts 19:25-27](#)].

You can see that the uproar of the silversmiths led by Demetrius was centered, actually, around their bread and butter. They made those little images and sold them, and they were doing very well. Many people would come to the temple of Diana in Ephesus since it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. So these men were getting rich by selling these images. I tell you again, you cannot step on a man's pocketbook without hearing him say, "Ouch!"

The worship of Diana had spread throughout Asia. Ephesus was a center of commerce and a center of religion and a center of worship. It was a center for the Oriental and the Occidental, a place where East and West did meet -- the worst in both came to Ephesus.

And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians [[Acts 19:28](#)].

They went around the city with their placards shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not [[Acts 19:29-30](#)].

Paul would have been mobbed, of course. He would absolutely have been killed. He already had one experience like that over in the Galatian country when he was stoned in Lystra.

And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre [[Acts 19:31](#)].

This is a mob action which is taking place. "The chief of Asia" were political or religious officials, called Asiarchs, who advised Paul against trying to address the mob. They told him it would be foolish and wouldn't do a bit of good for him to get into the mob.

Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people [[Acts 19:32-33](#)].

Alexander was probably a convert who was with Paul.

But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians [[Acts 19:34](#)].

This was typical mob action. Many of them didn't even know why they were gathered together. However, notice that they do not grant freedom of speech to anyone else. They would not permit Alexander to speak because they wanted to run around and squeal, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?

Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly [[Acts 19:35-36](#)].

The townclerk was, of course, a local official who told them that they were making too much out of this whole thing. He says, "Look at this great temple and at the great Diana. Nothing could happen to them. Nothing could be said against them!" Now, of course, they have been in ruins for nearly two thousand years.

For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another [[Acts 19:37-38](#)].

He is saying that if the silversmiths want to make a legal charge, the court is open.

But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly [[Acts 19:39-41](#)].

He told them that if they had some issue to bring up, they should all sit down and have an orderly meeting. They were to put down their placards and quit their shouting and running around. They were actually in danger of being accused of rioting. Riots are not something new, friend. This whole scene sounds very up to date.

He dismissed the crowd. When he called their attention to what they were actually doing, the crowd broke up and the people went home. Paul's ministry in Ephesus is over now. He leaves Ephesus and goes back to Macedonia.

Chapter 20

THEME: Third missionary journey of Paul concluded

After Paul's experience in Ephesus, he continues on to Macedonia, to Philippi, back to Troas, and to Miletus. The elders of the church in Ephesus meet him in Miletus and they have a tender reunion and a touching farewell.

Paul Goes Into Macedonia (20:1-4)

And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece [[Acts 20:1-2](#)].

This means that he revisited Athens and Corinth.

And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.

And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus [[Acts 20:3-4](#)].

The men named are all believers who had come to Christ under the ministry of Paul. He has quite a delegation now. These men have become missionaries.

We need to recognize that when Paul went through Greece and Macedonia, he visited all the churches which he had founded there. He would have stopped at Athens and Corinth, at Thessalonica and Berea and Philippi. So he retraced his steps and visited all the churches that were in Europe -- or at least in the European section of his third journey.

Paul At Troas (20:5-12)

You may remember that Troas was the springboard from which Paul leaped into Europe on his second missionary journey. Now he comes back to Troas on his last missionary journey.

These going before tarried for us at Troas [[Acts 20:5](#)].

The "us" indicates that Dr. Luke stays with Paul while the others go ahead of them to Troas.

This is quite a group of men, missionaries, who worked with Paul. I take it that these men had been traveling with Paul before. When Paul would have a ministry in a place like Corinth, probably these men would radiate out and have a ministry in the countryside and the small towns. We read in the Epistle to the Colossians about the fact that the Word of God had sounded out in that day to the whole world. That sounds unbelievable, but it was true. It was no oratorical gesture. Of course "the whole world" means the Roman world because that was the world of that day. The Word of God had spread throughout the

Roman world. We get some insight here and recognize that there were other people working with the apostles. Acts traces the work of Peter and Paul as the dominant ones -- Peter as the Apostle to the Jews and Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles. What we have here in the Book of Acts is a very limited account of the missionary work that was going on.

And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days [[Acts 20:6](#)].

It is interesting that the trip that took them five days to make can now be made by tourists in about fifty minutes. How different transportation is today! Transportation is more efficient, but our ministry is certainly not as effective.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight [[Acts 20:7](#)].

There are several things I want to say about this verse. I want you to note that it was upon the first day of the week that they came together. Where we have a record of the day on which the early church met, it was always the first day of the week. Paul tells the Corinthians that they are to bring their gifts on the first day of the week (see [1Cor. 16:2](#)). In our verse in Acts here it says that "when the disciples came together to break bread" it was "upon the first day of the week." This means that they celebrated the Lord's Supper on Sunday. It was on this day that Paul preached to them. The early church met on the first day of the week. That was the important day because it was the day when Jesus came back from the dead. Under the old creation the seventh day was the important day, the Sabbath Day. That belongs to the old creation. On the Sabbath Day Jesus was dead, inside the tomb. On the first day of the week He came forth. We meet on that day because we are now joined to a living Christ. That is the testimony of the first day of the week.

Now the other thing that interests me about this verse is that Paul was going to leave them the next day; so he preached all the way to midnight. Now, I do not know any congregation that would listen to me until midnight. I'm of the opinion that there aren't many preachers who would preach until midnight in these days in which we live. However, this is Paul's last visit. It is a tender meeting. He is getting ready to leave and he will not be back. This gives him an excuse to preach that long.

I tell congregations very frankly that I'm a long-winded preacher. I'm known as that. I love to teach the Word of God. I have a system of homiletics that I never learned in the seminary. I picked it up myself -- in fact, I got it from a cigarette commercial. This is it: It's not how long you make it but how you make it long. I believe in making it long; my scriptural authority for it is that Paul did it. He spoke until midnight. You can't help but smile at that.

And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together [[Acts 20:8](#)].

They had the place all lighted up. These early Christians didn't stay up until midnight whooping it up, but they were still up at midnight listening to the Word of God and

praising Him. May I say to you that we have let the world take away from us the fun that we ought to be having today with the things of God. So if your preacher goes a little overtime, friend, be patient with him. However, I think midnight was a little long for the apostle Paul to preach, because look what happened here.

And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead [[Acts 20:9](#)].

A friend of mine who preached up in the country of Middle Tennessee invited me to come there to hold some meetings in his church. In the summertime they would have quite protracted meetings at their Bible conference. It was interesting that in the back of the church there was a place for several pallets. When a little fellow would go to sleep, the mother holding him would simply get up and take him to the back of the room and put him down on the pallet. When another little fellow would go to sleep, his mother would get up with him and do the same thing. There would be six or more children asleep in the back of that church. One night after several mothers had put their children down on the pallet, my friend interrupted his message and remarked, "I'm a better preacher than the apostle Paul! Paul preached until midnight and he put only one to sleep. I'm preaching here until about nine o'clock and I've already put four to sleep!"

I confess that Paul's experience has always been a comfort to me. When I look out at the congregation and see some brother or sister out there sound asleep, I say to myself, "It's all right. Just let them sleep. Paul put them to sleep, too."

Can't you just see this Eutychus? It says that "he sunk down with sleep." He was sound asleep, and I can imagine that he was snoring. He fell from the third loft -- which means he was higher than the second floor. It is no longer a laughable experience. If this had been the end, it would have been a tragedy. But notice what happens.

And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.

When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.

And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted [[Acts 20:10-12](#)].

Paul raised this boy from the dead. You will remember also that Simon Peter raised Dorcas from the dead. This was a gift that belonged to the apostles. After the canon of Scripture was established, the sign gifts were not manifested -- they disappeared from the church. When Dr. Luke writes that they "were not a little comforted," he means they were really thrilled that this precious young man had been raised from the dead and was back in their midst. And now Paul continues to preach through the night even until daybreak. What a rebuke that is to us! In some churches there is a chorus of complaint if a pastor preaches ten or even five minutes longer than usual. These early believers sat up all night listening to Paul. I know someone is going to say, "If I could listen to Paul, I'd listen all night, too." Paul probably was nothing more than a humble preacher of the gospel. We do

know that Apollos was an eloquent man, but that is not said of Paul. These believers simply wanted to hear the Word of God. How wonderful that is!

Paul At Miletus (20:13-38)

And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot [[Acts 20:13](#)].

Now they are traveling again. Dr. Luke and others of the group sailed to Assos but Paul traveled on foot. Why do you suppose Paul did that? Well, I'm sure it was so that he could witness along the way. I think as he walked, there were many places along the way where he would stop to witness to people.

And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene.

And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus [[Acts 20:14-15](#)].

Now there is a good exercise in pronunciation as well as a little study in geography. I hope you will follow these journeys of Paul on a map. They make a nice little travelog.

For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost [[Acts 20:16](#)].

Paul wants to be in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost; so he is in a hurry. However, he was determined not to miss Ephesus. He stops at Miletus, which is the port of Ephesus.

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church [[Acts 20:17](#)].

A good map will show you that Ephesus was actually a little inland. The river there slowly filled up the harbor at Ephesus. Today the city of Ephesus is actually inland about two or three miles from the water's edge. A great part of the city is as much as five miles inland. Miletus is right down on the coast. Paul sent for the elders of Ephesus to come to Miletus to meet him there.

And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house.

Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ [[Acts 20:18-21](#)].

Paul was a faithful witness for Jesus Christ. He pulled no punches. He could declare that he had given them the Word of God, the total Word of God. I am not the first one to have a through the Bible program -- Paul taught it all. He gave to them the full counsel of God. He was faithful even in the face of opposition by the religious rulers of the Jews.

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God [[Acts 20:22-24](#)].

Here is a point over which many great teachers of the Bible differ. Some of my good friends in the ministry and many good, authoritative Bible teachers believe that Paul made a mistake in going to Jerusalem. They think that he should not have gone. However, this testimony which Paul gives is very clear. I believe that he was entirely in the will of God in going to Jerusalem. He is saying in effect, "I am going to Jerusalem. I am bound in the spirit because everywhere I have gone, the Spirit of God has shown me that bonds and affliction await me in Jerusalem." Now that is different from [Acts 16](#) when he was forbidden by the Spirit of God to preach in Asia. In fact God simply put up roadblocks which directed him to Europe. There is no roadblock here. Rather, the Spirit of God is revealing to Paul what he will be walking into when he reaches Jerusalem. Paul makes it clear that he realizes he will suffer if he goes to Jerusalem. He says, "I don't count my life dear. I'm willing to lay down my life for Jesus." He wanted to bring the gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem in his own hands. In his swan song Paul wrote, "I have finished my course." I think Paul touched all the bases. Jerusalem was one of those bases.

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God [[Acts 20:25-27](#)].

Paul knew that he would not see these folk again in this life. Paul also knew that he had honestly given to them the entire counsel of God.

As I write this, I am a retired preacher. I have made many blunders and have failed in many ways. But as I look back on my ministry, I can say truthfully that when I stood in the pulpit, I declared the Word of God as I saw it. I have the deep satisfaction of knowing that if I went back to any pulpit which I have held, I haven't a thing to add to what I have already said. I don't mean I couldn't say it in a better way, but the important thing is that I declared the whole counsel of God. I have always believed that the important issue is to get out the entire Word of God.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood [[Acts 20:28](#)].

This is the business of the officers of the church. They are not to run the church, but they are to see that the church is fed the Word of God.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them [[Acts 20:29-30](#)].

Friend, I have seen that happen. The Devil wants to get into a church where the Bible has been taught. He would like to wreck a radio ministry that is teaching the Word of God. The Devil is not our friend; he is our enemy. He wants to stop the teaching of God's Word. Paul warned them at Ephesus that this would happen to them. He tells them there will be little termites right in their midst who will really cause trouble for them.

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified [[Acts 20:31-32](#)].

He commends them to God and to the Word of His grace. That is what we can do whenever we leave our people.

I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me [[Acts 20:33-34](#)].

Paul was not covetous of money. He worked in order to support himself and those who were with him.

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him.

Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship [[Acts 20:35-38](#)].

This is a tender meeting between Paul and the elders of the church in Ephesus. These men love Paul and he loves them. It is difficult for them to let him go, knowing that they will not see him again in this life. They bid him a touching farewell.

Chapter 21

THEME: Paul goes to Jerusalem and is arrested

Paul has made three missionary journeys. He is returning now, and it is almost like a wonderful victory march as he comes back into the city of Jerusalem. But along the way warnings are coming to him. He knows that trouble awaits him in Jerusalem.

Chapter 20 concluded with the tender meeting he had with the Ephesian elders at Miletus. Now he boards ship for the voyage that will return him to Israel.

Paul At Tyre (21:1-7)

And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:

And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth [[Acts 21:1-2](#)].

Are you following him? He took a ship at Miletus and they sailed down to the southern coast of Asia Minor to Patara. There they changed ships. Now he is headed for Tyre on the seacoast north of Caesarea. It was actually on the coast of Israel in what was ancient Phoenicia. Today that is Lebanon.

Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden [[Acts 21:3](#)].

I love the way this is expressed here. I think the translators of our Authorized Version have captured something that the modern translations just miss. They "discovered Cyprus" on the left hand is a way of saying that as they were sailing towards Tyre, Cyprus loomed up in the distance on their left-hand side. Of course it doesn't mean that they were the first people to discover Cyprus. They saw the island and were near enough to recognize it, but they did not stop there. They were on their way to Tyre, a great commercial center which had been there since ancient times.

And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem [[Acts 21:4](#)].

This is the verse used by those Bible teachers who feel that Paul made a great mistake when he went up to Jerusalem. It shows that these men spoke to Paul through the Holy Spirit. If I understand this correctly, the Spirit of God is not going to contradict Himself. I believe He is saying the same thing here that He had said before. Paul is not to go up to Jerusalem unless he is prepared to make the required sacrifice. Paul keeps saying that he is willing to make the sacrifice. He is perfectly willing to lay down his life for the Lord Jesus. That is the way I think it should be understood.

For several reasons I do not believe that Paul stepped out of the will of God when he went up to Jerusalem. He had a sentimental reason for going there, but it was a good reason. He was carrying the offering from the gentile Christians to the suffering saints in Jerusalem. He wanted to present this to the church in Jerusalem with his own hands,

because it was his hands that at one time had wasted the church in Jerusalem. He had been partly responsible for the state of penury in which the saints in Jerusalem found themselves. Paul did not want to send some representative to Jerusalem; he wanted to go to Jerusalem himself.

Another reason I do not believe that Paul stepped out of the will of God is because of his writings later on. When Paul was in prison in Rome, the church at Philippi sent to him an expression of their sympathy. They loved him and they sympathized with his condition. But Paul wrote to them, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" ([Phil. 1:12](#)). Because what happened to Paul did not hinder the spread of the gospel, I do not believe that Paul was out of the will of God.

Furthermore, you remember that when the Lord appeared to Ananias and told him to go to Paul after his conversion, He said to Ananias, ". . . Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" ([Acts 9:15-16](#)). Up to this point in our study of Acts, Paul has not appeared before kings and rulers, but we know it is in the will of God that he should do so. In the next chapters we will find that he does go before kings. He will testify before King Agrippa. It is probable that he appeared before Nero in Rome. We know for certain that he reached those who were in Caesar's household because he sent greetings from them in his Epistle to the Philippians ([Php. 4:22](#)), which was written while he was a prisoner in Rome.

Finally, as I have already mentioned, in [2Timothy 4:7](#) Paul writes, ". . . I have finished my course. . . ." This was written at the end of his life. It seems to me that he would not say that if for a time he had stepped out of the will of God. I must confess that as I look back over my own ministry, I am confident that I stepped out of the will of God for a brief time. I didn't do it purposely. I did it ignorantly. I did it in a headstrong manner. I think the Lord has a way of making these things up to us. But I do not think that Paul at the end of his life could write that he had finished his course if he had been out of the will of God.

I have spent some time on this because there is controversy over it. I have several very good friends in the ministry who do not agree with my point of view, but we are still friends. I love these brethren in the Lord. I just tease them and say I hope they will see the light someday. As one of them said to me, "When we get in the presence of the Lord, we will all be in agreement."

And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed [[Acts 21:5](#)].

Again, this is a lovely thing that Paul did here. Paul and the people with him kneeled down there on the shore and prayed.

Friend, the best position to be in while praying is kneeling. However, you can pray in any posture and anywhere. Since I drive a great deal, I have learned to pray in the car. (When

you drive the freeways of Southern California, you had better learn to pray!) But the most appropriate posture when we come into the presence of Almighty God is to kneel.

And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship;
and they returned home again.

And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to
Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day
[\[Acts 21:6-7\]](#).

I have often wondered why Paul didn't stay there longer than that. You will notice the marvelous reception given to him and the number of believers in all these various places at that time. There must have been millions of believers in the Roman Empire by the end of the first century.

Paul At Caesarea (21:8-14)

And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and
came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the
evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him [\[Acts
21:8\]](#).

Paul is traveling down the coastline going from one place to another. I have driven that route by bus. Since there was no bus running in Paul's day, I'm sure that he walked this route. And what a ministry he had! Think of the believers that he met on the way. He had a real ministry and a real opportunity.

As I have been going from church to church, from town to town, from city to city, from place to place, ministering the Word of God, it is a great encouragement to see what God is doing in the lives of folk. When I was a pastor, I had to keep my nose to the grindstone, and I developed an Elijah complex -- "I'm the only one left. I'm all by myself. I am the only one standing for you, Lord." Friend, if you could go over the ground I have been over in the past year, it would thrill your heart to know the number of wonderful churches, wonderful Christian works, wonderful Christian homes, wonderful Christian believers that there are in this country and in other countries of the world. It has been a real thrill to my own heart to meet these believers. Undoubtedly this was also the experience of Paul.

And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy
[\[Acts 21:9\]](#).

Philip was an evangelist. The word literally means "one who announces good tidings." This verse shows that women did occupy a prominent place in the church. These particular women had the gift of prophecy. The New Testament had not been written as yet; so the gift of prophecy was needed in the early church.

And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea
a certain prophet, named Agabus.

And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound
his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So
shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle,

and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles [[Acts 21:10-11](#)].

The Holy Spirit is revealing to Paul what will happen to him when he goes up to Jerusalem. It is as though He is saying, "Paul, this is what you are going to face. Are you willing to do it?" God doesn't want Paul to feel that He let him stumble unwittingly into a trap. Paul knows what awaits him, and he still is perfectly willing to go. Actually, this prophet is not telling him anything new. Back in chapter 20, when he was still in Asia Minor, he already knew that bonds and afflictions waited for him.

And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Then Paul answered, what mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus [[Acts 21:12-13](#)].

Remember that this is Dr. Luke writing. He and the others didn't want to see Paul go to Jerusalem. The Spirit of God is revealing to Paul that he is going to be bound. Paul is not only willing to be bound but is also willing to die for Jesus in Jerusalem. He asks the believers not to cry and to break his heart. It is touching here to see the concern of the believers for the apostle Paul. My, how they loved him!

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done [[Acts 21:14](#)].

And I think the will of the Lord was done.

Paul At Jerusalem (21:15-26)

And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly [[Acts 21:15-17](#)].

Notice that when the apostle Paul came to Jerusalem, the church that was there received him gladly.

And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present [[Acts 21:18](#)].

What a glorious reception by the church in Jerusalem! He is a veteran now, friend. He has been in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs [[Acts 21:19-21](#)].

The Jews twisted a little what Paul was actually doing. Paul did not really teach the things that they claimed he was teaching.

We come now to another interesting passage about which good Bible expositors offer different explanations. Was Paul out or in the will of God when he went to Jerusalem and took a Jewish vow that evidently involved a sacrifice?

The believers here in Jerusalem speak of the thousands of Jewish converts to Christ. These Jews who had found their completion in Jesus Christ had not forsaken the Mosaic Law. However, they could not insist that Gentiles must come under the Law. On the other hand, Gentiles could not insist that the Jews forsake the practices of the Law -- provided they were not trusting them for salvation. Those who insist that the grace of God did not force the Gentiles to keep the Mosaic Law seem to forget that the same grace permits the Jew to continue in its precepts if he feels it is the will of God.

For example, we know that Peter had eaten nothing contrary to Mosaic Law until he visited Paul in Antioch. Also, Jewish believers had an abhorrence of eating anything that had been sacrificed to idols. This did not bother the conscience of the Gentile. However, if the eating of such meat offended the conscience of another believer and caused him to stumble, then it was wrong. Paul makes it very clear that meat does not commend us to God. "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse" ([1Cor. 8:8](#)).

Paul also wrote that if a person was brought up under certain customs, the grace of God allows him to follow those customs after he has accepted the Lord Jesus as his Savior. "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" ([1Cor. 7:17-20](#)).

Paul applies this principle in winning people for Christ. "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you" ([1Cor. 9:19-23](#)). I do not think that we should criticize Paul for what he does here in Jerusalem. Grace

permitted Paul to take a Jewish vow to win the Jews. If he had been a Gentile, it would have been questionable for him to adopt a foreign custom.

With that as a background, we understand Paul's action.

What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;

Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them [[Acts 21:22-26](#)].

Now what should Paul do? He has arrived at Jerusalem and has been given a royal reception by the church. He has given them the gift from the gentile churches. They have listened to his report and rejoiced in the way God has saved the Gentiles. Now they turn to Paul and tell him that there are thousands of Jews in Jerusalem who are trusting Christ and have accepted Him as their Messiah and Savior. None of them want to have a division in the church. There is only one church of Jesus Christ, not a Jewish church and a gentile church. A Jew who comes to Jesus Christ does not stop being a Jew. So they say to Paul, "Look, you are a Jew. That is your background. And you want to win the Jews for Christ." Paul says, "I sure do!" So they say, "Since you are a Jew, it wouldn't hurt you to go with these four Jewish men who have made a vow. They have shaved their heads and are going into the temple. Would you go along with them?" Paul says, "Sure."

Paul didn't take this vow because he was commanded to do so. He took this vow because he wanted to win these people.

Friend, you don't have to take a vow. But if you want to take a vow, you can. If you want to shave your head with a vow, that is your business. If you want to take a vow and let your hair grow long, that is your business. It is all right with the Lord. Under grace you have a right to do these things. Under grace you have the right to make a vow if you want to do so -- just so you understand that you are not saved by what you do but by the grace of God.

Paul In The Temple At Jerusalem (21:27-32)

And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him.

Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place [[Acts 21:27-28](#)]

As mobs generally do, this mob acts on assumption and misinformation.

(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) [[Acts 21:29](#)].

Here we find this distinction that we need to make. Paul, a Jew, brought up in that tradition, went to the temple when he came to Jerusalem. Trophimus who was a gentile Ephesian, apparently a convert through the ministry of Paul, when he was in Jerusalem with Paul, would have no inclination to go to the temple or take part in any ritual in the temple. That was not part of his background. Under grace he could have if he had wanted to. This is what I mean by our freedom under grace. Of course Paul knew that the vow he was taking had no bearing on his salvation. Both Jew and Gentile are saved only and alone by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Paul's vow probably included fasting and eating certain foods. That was a part of his background. Today as I travel around, I find that a great many Christians are diet faddists. It always amazes me to find how many there are. They are constantly telling me their advice about what this or that diet will do for me. May I say that the only difference a diet will make is in your physical body. A diet will not commend you to God. Under grace you can go on a diet or not go on a diet. It may have something to do with your health and your physical condition. It has nothing to do with your relationship to God. Oh, if God's people could only learn that!

And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul [[Acts 21:30-32](#)].

Notice their bitterness and hatred of Paul. They hate him because he is teaching that one does not need to go through the Mosaic system to be saved. Paul is right in following one of the customs of his people if he wants to. He is trying to win his own people. Although it didn't accomplish the purpose that he had in mind, I think it accomplished a God-given purpose.

The mob would have killed Paul if the captain and the soldiers had not intervened.

Paul Bound In Chains (21:33-40)

Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done [[Acts 21:33](#)].

This captain did not know Paul at all. He didn't cry out, "Oh, this is Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles." He wasn't looking upon him like that at all. He didn't know who he was and actually thought that he had committed some crime; so he put him in chains.

And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him [[Acts 21:34-36](#)].

Since the captain couldn't learn anything from the mob, he took Paul to the castle in order to find out what the charge was against him. The mob was not willing to settle for anything less than the death of Paul.

And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, canst thou speak Greek? [[Acts 21:37](#)].

The captain was amazed. He thought that he had bound a common criminal, but this man speaks fluent Greek. The captain understood that because he was a foreign emissary.

Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? [[Acts 21:38](#)].

He thought that Paul was a mob leader, one of the protesters taking a mob out into the country.

But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people [[Acts 21:39](#)].

Paul speaks Greek, but he informs the captain that he is a Jew. When the captain learns who Paul is, he says, "Well, sure. I didn't know who you were. Go ahead and speak to them."

And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying [[Acts 21:40](#)].

Although Paul speaks to the captain in Greek, when he addresses this Jewish mob, he speaks in their native tongue, Hebrew. And the minute he begins to address them in Hebrew, the language they love and understand, they listen to him.

Chapter 22

THEME: Paul's defense before the mob at Jerusalem

This chapter gives Paul's message before the mob. He recounts his encounter with Christ and his subsequent experience which brought him to Jerusalem. Then Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship to deliver himself from the awful whipping of a prisoner.

Let us listen to Paul. Here is a great message of the apostle Paul.

Paul's Defense Before The Mob (22:1-24)

Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you [[Acts 22:1](#)].

"Men?" Yes. "Brethren?" Yes, they belong to the same race. Yet these brethren want to kill him. Is he being sarcastic? No, because then he shows respect for the elder men, "and fathers."

(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith) [[Acts 22:2](#)].

The minute he begins to speak in Hebrew, they become quiet. It is like a raging wind suddenly dying down, like calming the waves of the seas. They are listening to a man who is one of them. He begins with his personal history.

I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day [[Acts 22:3](#)].

Paul is being persecuted by the Jewish leaders, by the religious leaders of that day. Paul shows them that he had been one of them -- he had been a Pharisee. One of the reasons he has so much sympathy for them and is so loving toward them is that he knows exactly how they feel. He is giving them his background because he wants to win them for Christ.

Paul had a tremendous background. Tarsus was actually the center of Greek learning of that day. The finest Greek university in Paul's day was in Tarsus, not in Athens or Corinth, which had passed their zeniths. Tarsus was a thriving Greek city and an educational center.

Undoubtedly Paul had been brought up in that university in Tarsus and had a Greek background, but he had also been in Jerusalem where he had studied under Gamaliel. They are listening to him now.

And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women [[Acts 22:4](#)].

Notice that Paul calls it "this way" again. He doesn't mention the church or the followers of Christ or Christians. He uses the term which they understand and which he understands. I think "this way" is still a good term to use. What is "this way"? Well, it is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is the person of the Lord Jesus.

He is saying to them, "Listen, I have the same background you folk have. I persecuted 'this way.' I know how you feel. I did the same thing."

As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? [[Acts 22:5-7](#)].

Paul is telling them his experience.

And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest [[Acts 22:8](#)].

I think you could have heard a pin drop in that crowd now.

And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me [[Acts 22:9](#)].

I want to stop to notice something here. If you will recall where we read about the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, it says, "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man" ([Acts 9:7](#)). Here Paul says, "But they heard not the voice of him that spake to me." This looks like it might be a contradiction, and it is something which the critic likes to pounce on.

Actually, there is no contradiction at all. The men heard a voice -- they heard the sound, but they did not understand what the voice said nor did they know whose voice it was. They simply heard a voice.

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,

Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard [[Acts 22:10-15](#)].

Notice that Paul had been given a private interview with the Lord Jesus. I believe that the Lord talked with him and taught him when he spent time out on that Arabian desert.

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him [[Acts 22:16-20](#)].

Paul never forgot that he had been present at the stoning of Stephen and actually had had charge over it. It left an indelible impression on his mind and prepared him for his own conversion.

And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live [[Acts 22:21-22](#)].

Paul mentions the Gentiles because he has been out in the gentile world speaking to them about Jesus Christ. The Jews know that. The minute he mentions the Gentiles, it is just like lighting a fuse. They will hear him no longer.

And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,

The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him [[Acts 22:23-24](#)].

You see, when Paul lapsed over into the Hebrew tongue and spoke to the mob in Hebrew, the captain stood there not able to comprehend what he was saying. The captain simply could not grasp what was happening nor could he understand the problem. All he could do when the mob broke into this rage was to take Paul inside the castle. He thought that since Paul was a prisoner, he would find out the truth about the whole matter by whipping him.

Paul Appeals To His Roman Citizenship (22:25-30)

And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? [[Acts 22:25](#)]

Paul is being misunderstood all the way around. The Jews thought he had brought Trophimus into the temple, and he hadn't done that. The captain thought he was an Egyptian who was a riot leader, and he wasn't that man. Notice who he is. He is a Hebrew who can speak fluent Greek. Also, he is a Roman citizen. He now appeals to that citizenship to escape the scourging of a prisoner.

When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.

Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born [[Acts 22:26-28](#)].

This captain, you see, was an ex-slave. He had saved his money or somehow he got the money to buy his freedom. He has advanced in the Roman army so that now he is a captain. He is amazed that he has a prisoner who is a Roman citizen who was born free.

Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them [[Acts 22:29-30](#)].

The captain finds that he has a remarkable man on his hands. He is a learned man who speaks Greek. He is not a common crook by any means. He is a Jew, but he is also a Roman citizen. The captain says, "I am not going to treat Paul like a common criminal. We will have a hearing to find out what the charges are against him." So the captain arranged a hearing before the chief priests and all their council.

Notice that Paul had many assets which made him suitable to be the missionary to the Roman Empire. He had a world view. Greek training had prepared him as the cosmic Christian. He was trained in the Mosaic system, which prepared him to interpret it in the light of the coming of Christ and His redemptive death and resurrection. Not the least of his assets was his Roman citizenship which finally opened the door for him to visit Rome.

Chapter 23

THEME: Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin

Paul is now a prisoner, and we will follow his life as a prisoner. From this point on we find Paul giving a defense of himself and his ministry. He will appear before several rulers. Because the Jews are plotting his death, he will be taken down to Caesarea. He will spend about two years there in prison before he finally appeals and is sent to Rome.

You recall we have mentioned that there has always been some controversy, some difference of opinion, as to whether or not Paul should have gone to Jerusalem. Was he in the will of God when he did this? I contend that he was entirely in the will of God. I think that as we move on we will find again and again that Paul is in the will of God. It is true that he has been arrested, and it is true that he is having a rough time, but that does not mean that he is not in God's will.

As we go along we can see the hand of God in the life of this man. The same One who moved in the life of Paul wants to move in your life and in my life today. That is the glory and wonder of it all, friend. Right down here where you and I walk in a commonplace way, God is moving in our lives. In one way we are living a very humble existence and many of us today have a very simple, routine life. Yet God is concerned and interested in us. God wants to give us that leading and guiding that you and I need for today in the complexity that faces us in our contemporary culture. Believe me, we need that help today. There is no question that we need God on the scene.

A great many people go to extremes today. They are trying to have some great emotional or revolutionary experience such as Paul had. I don't think that we need to do that. As a matter of fact, I doubt that you or I will have some great experience. It is by simple faith that one comes to Christ. We are to trust Him and to walk with Him. He will give the leading, the guidance, and direction in our everyday lives.

We have seen how the Roman captain arrested Paul and put him in prison and was going to beat him. He refrained from doing that when he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. He was amazed to find that Paul was a Jew who could speak Greek and was a Roman citizen. Paul was a highly educated, cosmopolitan gentleman.

Now the Sanhedrin, composed of the religious rulers, wants to try him. Paul makes a futile attempt here to explain his position and his conduct to the Sanhedrin. The Lord encourages Paul. Then we see that the plot to murder Paul leads to his transfer to Caesarea for trial before Felix. This is a remarkable section and a very thrilling account of the experiences of Paul as a prisoner for Jesus Christ.

Paul's Defense Before The Sanhedrin (23:1-10)

And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren,
I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to
smite him on the mouth [[Acts 23:1-2](#)].

Paul is before the Sanhedrin. The chief priest and the council are there. The rudeness of the high priest is appalling. He was not about to let Paul speak until he was ready to hear him.

Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall:
for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to
be smitten contrary to the law? [[Acts 23:3](#)].

Under Roman law no man was to be punished until judgment had been handed in. Just because a man is arrested and accused of a certain crime does not grant liberty to those

who had arrested him to abuse him. In that day the Roman law actually granted a great deal of justice. However, this incident and the trial of Jesus make us recognize that even the Roman law could be twisted and turned. Justice is dependent upon the one who is executing the law.

In our day there are a great many people who feel that if we change our form of government, or at least if we change our party from the one that is in power -- whichever it may be -- this will give us a solution to all our problems. It has never solved our problems in the past. The men who began our system of government had a great consciousness of God. Although a man like Thomas Jefferson was a deist and could not be called a born-again believer, he had a conviction that the Bible was the Word of God and he respected it. We don't find that in our leadership today, and yet we wonder why the system won't work. We think we need to change the system. Do you know what we need? We need to change men's hearts. It is man that needs changing, not the system.

The high priest orders Paul smitten on the mouth, and Paul speaks out against him very strongly. This should dispel the idea that Paul was some sort of pantywaist. The concept that humility makes a person a sort of Mr. Milquetoast is all wrong. Actually, humility and meekness mean that you submit yourself to the will of God, regardless of the cost. Paul is a meek man and a humble man, but he is not about to take injustice lying down. He calls this man a whited wall. "While you are judging me according to the Mosaic Law, you are breaking the Law yourself." That reveals that Paul also knew the Law. A man cannot be condemned or punished before judgment has been handed down.

And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest [[Acts 23:4](#)].

Paul didn't know this man was the high priest. Certainly he would recognize the high priest on sight. Before his conversion he had been a Pharisee in judgment. I think this is another evidence that Paul had an eye disease and didn't see too well. As we go into the Epistles, we will find other statements which indicate that Paul had trouble with his vision.

Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest:
for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people
[[Acts 23:5](#)].

Paul knew the Law. He knew every detail of it. He knew that the Law said that rulers were to be respected.

This is something else that we have forgotten today. I personally believe that the president of the United States, regardless of who he is or how bad he is, ought never to be made a subject of a cartoon. He should not be ridiculed because of the position he holds. We should respect the office. We as human beings need to respect authority. Paul wrote: "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" ([Rom. 13:7](#)). It is interesting that he wrote this at a time when Nero was on the throne in Rome, and Nero was a madman.

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren,

I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question [[Acts 23:6](#)].

We are getting more of Paul's background. His father had also been a Pharisee, probably a wealthy and influential man.

Paul uses the discord between two parties to further his own defense. The issue here is not the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is simply that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead and had this hope, while the Sadducees did not. So Paul turns the trial into a theological argument between the "fundamentalists" and the "liberals." That is easy to do. There never has been a time when you couldn't get these two groups at each other's throats! That is what Paul is doing here.

And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken of him, let us not fight against God [[Acts 23:7-9](#)].

The Pharisees now come to Paul's defense. When they find out he is a Pharisee, they rally around him to defend him.

And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle [[Acts 23:10](#)].

This is the first time that Dr. Luke says there was "a great dissension." Knowing how he uses understatement, I am of the opinion that this is the worst dissension recorded in the Book of Acts concerning any group. Paul's life is so in danger again that the Roman captain reaches in and saves him from the angry Sanhedrin. While I have defended Gallio's concept of the separation of church and state, the state is protecting the apostle Paul at this point, which is quite proper. So the chief captain rescues Paul again without learning the real nature of the hatred against Paul.

The Lord Appears To Paul (23:11)

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome [[Acts 23:11](#)].

This again shows that Paul was not out of the will of God in going to Jerusalem. The Spirit of God had warned Paul that he could expect bonds and difficulties if he went to Jerusalem. In spite of this, Paul had gone to Jerusalem and had witnessed for the Lord Jesus in that city. Now God tells him that just as he has testified in Jerusalem so he will also bear witness in Rome. This is God's method. Paul had never had such an opportunity to witness in Jerusalem before. Now God is going to give him the opportunity to witness in Rome. It is God's will that he should go to Rome also.

It is important to note that there is no rebuke to Paul from the Lord. He doesn't say, "Look, Paul, I told you not to go to Jerusalem because you would get in trouble there." Rather, the Lord encourages him. He is using this means to get Paul over to Rome.

The Plot Against Paul (23:12-22)

And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul [[Acts 23:12](#)].

I imagine they got pretty hungry and thirsty before this was over!

And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him [[Acts 23:13-15](#)].

This is the plot to put Paul to death. It's well that the Lord Himself has made it very clear to Paul that He has a different plan for him; he is going to Rome.

And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee [[Acts 23:16-18](#)].

Paul is exerting his right as a Roman citizen, which he has a perfect right to do. Also, we learn more about Paul's family. We see that he has a sister who lives with her family in Jerusalem.

Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?

And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me [[Acts 23:19-22](#)].

In this way the captain is alerted to the plot against Paul.

Let's stop to note something here. I find today that there is a group of super-pious folk, very sincere and very well-meaning, which tells me I should not go to a doctor concerning my cancer or other illnesses but that I should trust the Lord to heal me. Well, I certainly do trust the Lord; I have turned my case over to the Great Physician, and I believe He provides doctors. It would have been a simple thing for Paul to have told his nephew, "Thanks for telling me the news, but I'm trusting the Lord -- so you can go back home." But we find here that Paul used the privileges of his Roman citizenship which were available to him. Obviously the Lord provides these means and He expects us to use them. This in no way means that we are not trusting Him. Rather, we are trusting God to use the methods and the means to accomplish His purpose.

Paul Sent To Caesarea (23:23-35)

The chief captain goes into action. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night [[Acts 23:23](#)].

A centurion, you remember, had one hundred soldiers under him.

And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor [[Acts 23:24](#)].

This is quite an army that is going to escort Paul down to Caesarea. Is this what one calls trusting the Lord? Of course it is the captain who has ordered it, but Paul has called for this type of protection from him. Certainly Paul is in the will of God in doing this. It certainly reveals the danger that Paul was in. There is no doubt that the Jews had every intention of putting him to death.

He is sending Paul to Caesarea to appear before Felix, the governor. The Roman governors had their headquarters in Caesarea and only occasionally went up to Jerusalem. Pilate had had his headquarters there. The ruins of that Roman city are still there today. It has a lovely situation on the coast.

I can understand why those Romans would rather live in Caesarea than in Jerusalem. The climate was delightful when I was there, and I got very cold in Jerusalem.

Paul is to be sent to Felix in Caesarea. This will remove Paul from the danger in Jerusalem.

And he wrote a letter after this manner [[Acts 23:25](#)].

Although Dr. Luke may have had the actual letter, when he says the letter was "after this manner" it probably means that he didn't have access to the letter but is giving us the sense of it.

Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greetings [[Acts 23:26](#)].

Notice the formal manner of address. In those days they didn't sign letters as we do today. They put their name at the beginning of the letter rather than at the end of the letter.

This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman [[Acts 23:27](#)].

The captain in Jerusalem wants the governor in Caesarea to know that he is performing his duty. He is protecting Roman citizens.

And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:

Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds [[Acts 23:28-29](#)].

It is clear that Claudius Lysias never did know exactly what the charge was against Paul. He knew it pertained to their law. Under Roman law Paul was not guilty of anything worthy of death or of imprisonment.

And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.

On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;

I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall [[Acts 23:30-35](#)].

We will find that his accusers were quick to come down to Caesarea. They didn't hesitate to follow Paul. As we move along, I think you will detect that Paul is not defending himself as much as he is witnessing for Christ. The Lord Jesus had said he would witness before governors and rulers and kings. He is being brought before them. This is God's method. Paul is in the will of God, and God is carrying out His purpose.

Chapter 24

THEME: Paul before Felix

This chapter opens and closes with Paul a prisoner in Caesarea. As we have seen, he was brought here secretly from Jerusalem to elude the Jews who had plotted his murder.

Candidly, Paul had failed in gaining the sympathies of his brethren for the gospel ministry in which he was engaged. I suspect that this was a time of mental depression and discouragement for him, because the Lord came to him in the night to give him encouragement ([Acts 23:11](#)). He told His faithful servant that he would witness to Him in Rome also. The Lord did not promise him that it would be easy. Many trying experiences and hardships were immediately before him. In fact, from here to his final martyrdom there was nothing but peril and danger -- actually that had been the pattern since the day he was let down in a basket over the wall at Damascus.

In this chapter we will learn that the high priest Ananias and the elders come down from Jerusalem to accuse Paul before Felix. Paul is accused of sedition, rebellion, and profaning the temple.

Paul Before Felix (24:1-23)

And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul [[Acts 24:1](#)].

The accusers didn't waste time. They came down after five days in order to press charges against Paul. They brought with them a man named Tertullus who would act as the prosecuting attorney. He was a clever and well-prepared man. The charge he brought was very well prepared, too. It was brief and to the point. I think he did the best he could with the charges he had.

And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence [[Acts 24:2](#)].

He starts out with flattery in his address to Felix. This had nothing in the world to do with the charge against Paul.

We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness [[Acts 24:3](#)].

Believe me, he is really buttering up the governor.

Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes [[Acts 24:4-5](#)].

He calls Paul a mover of sedition. He couldn't prove that, of course.

Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,

Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so [[Acts 24:6-9](#)].

The "Jews" are the religious rulers who came down to press charges.

Notice he makes subtle insinuations about the way the chief captain handled the case. He cannot charge him with dereliction of duty, but there is a faint breath of criticism to the governor. He says the Jews could have handled this case adequately themselves. He has nothing but flattery for Felix, unjust charges against Paul, and subtle insinuations against Claudius Lysias.

So the charges against Paul are that he is a mover of sedition, he is a leader of a rebellious sect, and he has profaned the temple. Tertullus presents these charges for the religious rulers. Now Paul makes his defense before Felix.

Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:

Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship [[Acts 24:10-11](#)].

Paul is saying that he is delighted to present his case before Felix. He knows that Felix has been a judge of the people for a long time, which means that Felix understands their customs. So what Paul is going to say will not be something that will be strange or foreign to Felix.

And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:

Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets [[Acts 24:12-14](#)].

Since Felix understands the customs of the Jews, Paul tells him that he went up to Jerusalem to worship according to their custom. In substance he says, "I am in agreement with my nation. Only I must confess that the way in which I worship God is to them heresy." But Paul makes it clear that the way he worships is according to the message to the fathers, that is, the Old Testament.

And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust [[Acts 24:15](#)].

Have you noticed that the Resurrection is the very center of Christianity? It has been from the very beginning, friend. "What think ye of Christ?" is always the test. Did He die for your sins? Was He raised from the dead? Paul immediately comes to the core: the Resurrection.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men [[Acts 24:16](#)].

Paul testifies that what he has done, he has done for the sake of his conscience.

Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings [[Acts 24:17](#)].

Paul came to bring to the church in Jerusalem the gifts which he had been gathering on his third missionary journey. I have a notion it was a substantial gift which the gentile believers sent to Jerusalem, and Paul wanted to bring that gift with his own hands.

Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had aught against me [[Acts 24:18-19](#)].

The real accusers, if there were any at all, are not even present. The charge that Tertullus makes is that Paul had been stirring up people in the temple. Why don't the people who were being stirred up testify against Paul? They aren't there, and Paul calls attention to it.

Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council [[Acts 24:20](#)].

"Let them tell you about my appearance before the Sanhedrin. Did they find that I had done anything evil? Let them give testimony about that."

Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day [[Acts 24:21](#)].

He tells Felix again that the real issue is the Resurrection. The Resurrection is the very heart of the gospel message. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again on the third day. In fact, I think of Christianity as an arch supported by two pillars. One pillar is the death of Christ and the other pillar is the resurrection of Christ. Without one or the other the arch would fall.

And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter [[Acts 24:22](#)].

Felix had been hearing about "that way"; he knew the death and resurrection of Christ was being preached. He realized that Paul was the expert, that Paul was the man who

could tell him all about it. So he deferred the Jews because he wanted to have another hearing with Paul about this matter. He told the Jews he would wait until Lysias could come down, and then he could get the real story about what had happened to Paul. Apparently he could make no decision from the contradictory testimony that was offered here. Tertullus was making certain accusations. Paul said the real issue was the Resurrection. So he defers judgment.

And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him [[Acts 24:23](#)].

Actually, Felix should have freed Paul. However, he was a politician, an astute politician. He does give Paul a great deal of liberty while still keeping him a prisoner.

Felix Has Paul In For A Private Audience (24:24-27)

And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee [[Acts 24:24-25](#)].

A sinner will never have "a convenient season" to hear the gospel.

This man Felix already knew something about the gospel, or "the Way," which is synonymous with what we today call Christianity or the Christian faith. I personally would like to see the name "the Way" restored because Christianity, as it is used today, is a most abused word and has lost its real meaning.

I heard a man, actually a good preacher, say the other day that we live in a Christian nation. My friend, we don't live in a Christian nation! This country is not Christian by any stretch of the imagination. We have a lot of church members, but the number of real Christians composes a small minority today.

Felix called Paul in to explain to him the gospel which had induced this entire situation. He called Paul in "and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." Some Bible teachers caption this section "Paul's Defense Before Felix." I disagree with that. Paul was not defending himself here. What he was doing in this second appearance before Felix was witnessing to him, trying to win this man for Christ.

The scriptural record does not present this man Felix in the bad light that secular history does. I would like you to know what a rascal he really was. To know the man, we must turn to the record of that day. Felix was a freed slave who through cruelty and brutality had forged to the front. He was a man given to pleasure and licentiousness. By the way, his very name means "pleasure." The Roman historian, Tacitus, says this concerning him: "Through all cruelty and licentiousness he exercised the authority of a king with the spirit of a slave." This was the man into whose hands Paul was placed. Yet the Scripture does not condemn him.

His wife Drusilla sat there alongside him. Again secular history turns the spotlight on her for us. She was a daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Her father killed the apostle James -- we have already seen that in [Acts 12:1-2](#). The great uncle of this woman had slain John the Baptist. Her great-grandfather tried to kill the Lord Jesus Christ.

This couple of rascals, Felix and Drusilla, are in an exalted position. They probably would never have attended a church in which the gospel was preached, nor would they have gone to hear Paul the apostle if he had come to town to preach. Yet here are these two who have this great opportunity given to them under the most favorable circumstances. They have a private interview with the greatest preacher of the grace of God that the world has ever known. God gives them a private sermon. Their palace becomes a church and their thrones become almost a mourner's bench. Oh, the wonder of the grace of God to give these two a chance! The hour of salvation struck for them. The door of the kingdom was opened and they had their opportunity to enter. This is in fulfillment of the verse in the second psalm: "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth" ([Ps. 2:10](#)). It appears that they heard Paul with a great deal of interest. I think Felix would have liked to have made a decision for Christ. But he didn't make that decision. He wanted to wait for a convenient season. My friend, the sinner will never have a convenient season to hear the gospel. Man does not set the time; God does.

Paul reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. This makes a very good sermon, by the way. Righteousness here is, I think, the righteousness of the Law, which man cannot attain. In other words, the Law reveals that man is a sinner, and he cannot even present a legal righteousness that would be acceptable to God. A sinner must have a standing of legal righteousness before God, and he cannot provide it for himself. So God provides it for him in Christ Jesus. That is the "robe" of righteousness which comes down like a garment over those who put their trust in Christ. That is the righteousness "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" ([Rom. 3:22](#)). Paul reasoned with this man about the righteousness of the Law which he could not meet and the righteousness which Christ provides the sinner who puts his trust in Him. Then Paul talked of temperance, which is self-control. Felix was a man mastered by passion and cruelty. These two, Felix and Drusilla, great sinners, living in sin, did not know what real freedom was. Then Paul spoke about the judgment to come, which is the final judgment at the Great White Throne of [Revelation 20:11-15](#).

Friend, today your sins are either on you or they are on Christ. If your sins are on Christ, if you have put your trust in Him, then He paid the penalty for your sins over nineteen hundred years ago. They do not lie ahead of you for judgment in the future. But if your sins today are still on you, then there is yet a judgment to come. People don't like to hear about judgment to come.

Felix and Drusilla did not like to hear about it either. But if your sins are not on Christ, that is, if you have not trusted Him as your Savior, then you are going to come up for judgment. You can close this book right now, but that doesn't alter a thing. You cannot escape the fact that you are coming up for judgment.

Very few preachers touch on this subject. Those who still teach the Bible are the only ones who mention it at all, and most preachers soft-pedal it. I received a letter from a college professor in Virginia who wrote, "I listened to you and I was about ready to tune you out when I found out you were a hell-fire and damnation preacher. But I noticed that you didn't handle it in a crude way, and then I noticed that you did offer salvation; so I continued to listen to you." Hell-fire and damnation is a pretty good subject if it is used to lead one to Christ, friend. But it should never be used alone without the message of salvation which we have in Christ Jesus.

It is interesting to observe Felix here. When Paul had to appear before Felix, Ananias the high priest, the elders, and the great orator Tertullus came to bring their charges against him. Felix could immediately see that they had no real charge. He should have let Paul go free. But Felix was most of all a politician and did not want to antagonize the Jews. He did not do what was right but did what was politically expedient. Then Felix had this private interview with Paul, and Paul apparently really touched him. Yet he delayed his decision and postponed the day.

It has been proven out in the history of the human family for nineteen hundred years that folk can keep postponing making a decision for Christ until they come to the place where they cannot make a decision for Him at all. That is the reason that most decisions for Christ are made by young people -- we ought to try to reach young people for Christ. Also this is the reason a person need not think that because he is getting older he is becoming smarter. Older people just become more hardened to the gospel. Years ago I heard the late Dr. George Truett, a great prince of the pulpit in Dallas, Texas, tell an incident that illustrates this fact. It was at the celebration of his fiftieth anniversary that a lawyer friend, who was not a Christian, came to him. He said, "George, you and I came here to Dallas at the same time. You were a young preacher and I was a young lawyer. I must confess that when I first heard you, I was moved a great deal by your sermons. Very frankly, there were nights when I couldn't sleep. As the years wore on, the day came when I could listen to you and enjoy hearing you. Your message didn't disturb me at all. And you're a much greater preacher today than you were at the beginning." The lawyer chuckled about it. He didn't realize how tragic it was. He didn't realize the place to which he had actually come. "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee," said Felix. That time never came for Felix. That time never came for the lawyer in Dallas. That time does not come for a great many people who postpone receiving Christ.

He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul,
that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener,
and communed with him [[Acts 24:26](#)].

He was a clever politician and also a crook, by the way. He hoped that he would be bribed and then he would have let Paul go free.

But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix,
willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound [[Acts 24:27](#)].

Felix played politics to the very end. He left Paul in prison. Again we say that Roman justice was no better than the men who executed it. Either Paul was guilty or he was not

guilty. If guilty of treason, he should have been put to death. If not guilty, he should have been freed. One or the other should have been done. Under no circumstances should he have been left in prison for two years.

Chapter 25

THEME: Paul before Festus

Paul had been unjustly kept in prison for two years. Festus is the new governor who followed Felix. Now Paul will appear before this new governor.

We have seen Paul before the mob on the steps of the castle in Jerusalem. We have seen him before the Sanhedrin. We have seen him before Felix and then in private interview with Felix and his wife Drusilla. Apparently there were other meetings. Now he will appear before Festus. Later he will appear before Agrippa. Paul appeared before all these rulers and it must have been a tedious time for Paul, something to try his patience. However, I'm sure that he rejoiced in the opportunity given him to testify before the high political figures of the Roman Empire. Remember that when the Lord Jesus had apprehended Paul on the Damascus road, He had said, ". . . he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" ([Acts 9:15](#)). Paul is moving according to God's plan and program.

Each time Paul tells about what the Lord Jesus had done for him, and he tells it with a great deal of conviction and enthusiasm. Paul witnesses a good confession of Jesus Christ. Although Felix trembled as he listened, the rascality and cupidity and covetousness of this man triumphed. He had his chance. He sent for Paul many times, but he wanted a bribe, not salvation.

Those two years that Paul languished in prison are silent years in the life of Paul. Perhaps he chafed under it all. We don't know. We do know that the hand of God was manifested in all this, and His purposes were carried out. How comforting this can be for us when our activity seemingly comes to a standstill.

Paul Appears Before Festus (25:1-12)

Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him.

And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither [[Acts 25:1-4](#)].

It seems that Festus understood the situation. I'm of the opinion that Felix told him about Paul's imprisonment, and I think he explained the circumstances. I'm sure he told Festus that he had brought him to Caesarea to protect him from being put to death by the Jews. So when Festus gets word from the Jews that they want Paul in Jerusalem, he says, "Oh, I

won't bring him down here. I'm going back to Caesarea myself. I'm not going to stay around in Jerusalem." Here was another Roman who preferred Caesarea to Jerusalem.

The enemies of Paul certainly didn't waste any time getting to the new governor to try to get a judgment against Paul. I don't know whether Festus was actually aware of their plan to ambush the party and kill Paul. I think he was, but it doesn't really say that he knew about it. However, he refused to accede to their demands and requested instead that they come to Caesarea to bring charges.

Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove [[Acts 25:5-7](#)].

Paul is again called upon to defend himself against the accusations of the Jews. However it provides an opportunity to present the gospel to Festus.

While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? [[Acts 25:8-9](#)].

This Festus is another rascal. Paul is not only in the midst of a den of thieves, he is in the midst of a bunch of rascals.

Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest [[Acts 25:10](#)].

There are some people who think that Paul made a mistake here, that he should never have appealed to Caesar. They think he should simply have let his case rest with Festus. Friend, don't you see that Festus was going to use Paul for his own political ends? Festus was going to take Paul back to Jerusalem. Perhaps Festus was receiving bribes from the Jews who had come from Jerusalem. I am reluctant to criticize Paul. I don't think that he made a mistake here. Paul was a Roman citizen and he exercised his rights as a citizen, which was the normal and the right thing for him to do. Going back to Jerusalem would have surely meant death for him. He doesn't purposely make himself a martyr. In fact, he did what he could to avoid martyrdom.

Friend, there are a people today who wear a hair shirt -- and God didn't give it to them. In other words, they like to take the position of a martyr. I've had a number of people who have told me that I should rejoice that I have a cancer because now I can suffer for Christ and maybe die for Christ. Well, I can tell you, I don't feel that way about it. I want to get rid of the cancer. I want to live. I think a person is depressed spiritually and mentally if he

wants to put on a hair shirt and lie on a cold slab. Martin Luther tried that and he found it didn't accomplish anything.

You will remember that two years before this the Lord had appeared to Paul and had promised him a trip to Rome ([Acts 23:11](#)). That's what is taking place. He went to Rome by the will of God. He was in chains -- but the Lord hadn't told him how he would get to Rome. This was God's method for him. When Paul wrote to the Romans, he told them that he was praying to be able to come to Rome and he asked them to pray that he might be able to come ([Rom. 1:9-10](#); [Rom. 15:3-32](#)). I believe he went to Rome by the will of God.

For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar [[Acts 25:11](#)].

I detect a note of impatience here. Rome was noted for its justice, and Paul respected authority. However, Paul is not getting justice, and so he makes a legal appeal. God intended that Paul use his rights as a Roman citizen. It is very interesting for us to observe that God leads some people in one way and leads others in another way. Some of the others could not claim the protection of Roman citizenship.

I knew a wonderful Christian man and wife whom the Lord had blessed in a material way. They had built a lovely home, a home in which it was always a delight to visit. The man told me that he felt under conviction because he had a lovely home, and he wanted to open his home and use it for Christian witnessing and testimony as much as possible. So I asked him, "Did you ever stop to think that God blessed you materially and gave you such a nice home because He knew you were the kind of a man who would use his home for Him?" Then I said to him, "You just go ahead and fall into a sweet sleep every night, knowing that you are in the will of God and thanking Him for that lovely home." Now the Lord didn't give me that kind of a home because evidently He doesn't intend for me to use my home for that type of thing.

What has the Lord done for you, friend? Whatever it is, you should use it for Him. If you are in a political position, you should use that position for Him. If the Lord has put something in your hand, use it for Him. Remember that Moses had a rod in his hand -- just a rod, but he was to use it for God. That is the whole thought here. Paul had his Roman citizenship. It was a rod in his hand. He's going to use it, use it for God. I don't think that Paul made a mistake here.

Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go [[Acts 25:12](#)].

Festus is forced to concur with Paul at this point. He cannot prevent Paul from going to Rome to the court of Caesar.

King Agrippa And Bernice Come To Visit Festus (25:13-22)

And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus [[Acts 25:13](#)].

Festus had just come into office as the new governor; so the king comes over for a visit. I have a notion these politicians work together. They all belong to the same party.

And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:

About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him [[Acts 25:14-15](#)].

Agrippa and Bernice stayed there quite a long time. Dr. Luke calls it "many days." Finally they ran out of conversation. Even a king and a governor finally run out of things to talk about. When there was a lull in the conversation, Festus said, "Oh, by the way, I should tell you about a prisoner that we have here. It's a rather odd, unusual case. His name is Paul and he was arrested and brought down here by Felix. Felix left him for me. I'd like you to hear him."

To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him [[Acts 25:16](#)].

I'd like to call your attention to this. We sometimes think that Roman law was not just because we have seen how it went awry in the case of the Lord Jesus and also in the case of the apostle Paul. However, this was not because of the law but because of the crooked politicians. We still operate under the principle of Roman law that no man is to be sentenced until he has been brought into the presence of his accusers and his crime established.

Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.

Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:

But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive [[Acts 25:17-19](#)].

The issue is always the same: it is the Resurrection. We see from this that Paul had witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus Christ so that Festus knew about it.

And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.

Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself.
To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him [[Acts 25:20-22](#)].

Actually, Festus was in a sort of hot seat here. The charge against Paul was sedition and for that he should die, but he had committed no crimes. Now Paul has appealed to Caesar. What are you going to do with a prisoner like that? So he asked Agrippa to help him out.

I'm of the opinion that Agrippa had previously heard about Paul and was actually anxious to hear him. He wanted to know more about the charges and he wanted to hear what Paul would have to say. So they arranged for a meeting.

It is interesting to see how this meeting was arranged by a king and a governor. Yet all the while they were actually fulfilling prophecy even though they were unaware of this. Paul is to appear before kings, as the Lord had said.

The Hearing Before Festus And Agrippa (25:23-27)

And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth [[Acts 25:23](#)].

What a scene this was! Wherever did a preacher have a greater audience than this man? The setting is dramatic with great pomp and ceremony. Paul appears in chains before this august company of rulers and kings. Festus is asking Agrippa to help him frame a charge against Paul to send him to Caesar.

And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him [[Acts 25:24-27](#)].

Paul uses this opportunity to preach one of the greatest sermons ever recorded.

Chapter 26

THEME: Paul before Agrippa

This testimony of Paul is not a defense of himself. It is a declaration of the gospel with the evident purpose of winning Agrippa and the others present to Christ. This is a

dramatic scene, and this chapter is one of the greatest pieces of literature, either secular or inspired.

This chapter was marvelous to me even before I was saved. When I was a young man, I was connected with a little theater. You know that everybody at some time wants to be an actor, and I had the foolish notion that I could become one. The director suggested that I memorize chapter 26 of the Book of Acts. She didn't give me the Bible, but this chapter was printed in some other book and I memorized it from that. I must say that it has always had a tremendous effect upon me.

Paul's Testimony Before Agrippa (26:1-32)

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself [[Acts 26:1](#)].

The appearance of Paul before Agrippa is, in my judgment, the high point in the entire ministry of this apostle. It is a fulfillment of the prophecy that he should appear before kings and rulers. Undoubtedly it was God's will that he should come before King Agrippa. I have already indicated that this made a profound impression on me when I memorized it. I must confess that it had some effect upon my decision later on to study for the ministry.

There are several features about this chapter that we ought to note before we get into Paul's message before King Agrippa. First of all, I want to make it clear again that Paul is not on trial. This is not a court trial. Paul is not making a defense before Agrippa. He is preaching the gospel. In view of the fact that this great apostle had appealed to Caesar, not even King Agrippa could condemn him, and he is certainly out of the hands of Governor Festus, as the final verse of this chapter confirms: "Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" ([v. 32](#)). They no longer had the authority to condemn him. Neither could they set him free. They are helpless. So Paul is not attempting to make a defense. Rather he is trying to win these men for Christ.

This was not a trial, but it was a public appearance of Paul before King Agrippa and the court so that they might learn firsthand from the apostle what "that way" really was. You see, everyone was talking about The Way. Someone would ask another, "Say, have you heard about this new thing, The Way?" The other would reply, "Well, I have heard some things about it. It is something new going around. What's it all about?" I would imagine that even Festus and Agrippa had some sort of exchange like that. Agrippa would have said, "I've been hearing about this but I'd like to know more about it. We ought to get it from an expert." Therefore they have this public appearance to explain The Way. I think this was one of the most splendid opportunities that any minister ever had to preach Christ. There has never again been an opportunity quite like this.

This was an occasion filled with pagan pomp and pageantry. It was a state function filled with fanfare and the blowing of trumpets. There was the tapestry and tinsel. The function was attended by all the prominent personages of that section and the prestige of Rome. There must have been a scramble for people to be able to attend this occasion. The purple of Agrippa and the pearls of Bernice were in evidence. There were the gold braid and the

brass hats of the Roman Empire. The elect and the elite, the intelligentsia and the sophisticates had all turned out in full regalia. There would be the pride and ostentation and the dignity and display which only Rome could put on parade in that day.

Notice again how Dr. Luke records it: "And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth" ([Acts 25:23](#)).

This stirs the imagination. I trust that somehow we can picture this scene before us as we listen to the message of Paul. This elaborate gathering is for just one purpose: to hear from a notable prisoner by the name of Paul. He is the one who has already been over the greater part of the Roman Empire, certainly the eastern part of it, preaching The Way.

When the door of that great throne room swings open, a prisoner in chains is ushered into this colorful scene. He is dressed in the garb of a prisoner, and he is chained to two guards. He is unimpressive in his personal appearance. This is the man who teaches and preaches the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ for men because they are sinners and need a Savior. This is the one who can speak with authority about the new Way. And they will listen to this man because he knows how to speak and because he is an intelligent man. The light of heaven is on his face. He is no longer Saul of Tarsus but Paul the apostle. What a contrast he is to that gay, giddy crowd of nobility gathered there!

Festus told how the Jews had tried to kill Paul. My, how they hated him, and yet they had no real charge against him. That whole crowd looked at Paul, and I rather think that he looked over the whole crowd.

Paul is not a scintillating personality. Some liberal has called him, "Pestiferous Paul." Well, you can call him that if you want to. Maybe in the Roman Empire that is what they thought of him. Remember that the Lord Jesus had said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" ([John 15:18](#)). This man is true to the Lord Jesus, so the world will hate him.

I do not think, frankly, that Paul was physically attractive. Yet he had the dynamic kind of attraction which the grace of God gives to a man. He was energized by the Holy Spirit. Oh, that you and I might be able to say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" ([Gal. 2:20](#)).

Now let's turn our eyes from the glitter and the glamour of the occasion to the two men who stand out in this assembly: Agrippa and Paul. What a contrast! One of them is in purple, the other is in prison garb. One is on a throne, the other is in shackles. One wears a crown, the other is in chains. Agrippa is a king, but in the slavery of sin. Paul is a chained prisoner, rejoicing in the freedom of sins forgiven and liberty in Christ. Agrippa is an earthly king who could not free Paul nor himself. Paul is an ambassador of the King who had freed him and who could free Agrippa from the damning effects of sin.

We need to remember that King Agrippa was a member of the family of Herod. He belonged to the rottenest family that I know anything about. It is the worst family that is mentioned in the Bible. I think old Ahab and Jezebel were like Sunday school kids compared to the Herod family. You know the old bromide about giving the Devil his due. Well, let's give the Herods their due. Agrippa was an intelligent man and a great man in many respects in spite of his background. He knew the Mosaic Law, that is, he knew the letter of it. Paul rejoiced in this because it gave him an opportunity to speak to a man who was instructed and who would understand the nature of the charges.

As I have said before, I can't help but believe that Paul was getting a little impatient during those two years of incarceration. He had appeared before the mob in Jerusalem, before the captain, then before Felix (publicly, then privately many times), then he appeared before Festus. Now he must appear before Agrippa. None of these other men fully understood the background of the charges against Paul. Neither did they understand the gospel. This is true even of the Roman captain in Jerusalem. It is amazing that these people could have lived in that area, have been exposed to Christians, have heard the apostle Paul, and still not really have understood. Yet that was the situation.

Paul's plea to Agrippa to turn to Christ is magnificent. It is logical and it is intelligent. Rather than being a defense, it is a declaration of the gospel.

I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently [[Acts 26:2-3](#)].

Paul is now speaking to a man who understands what he is talking about. Agrippa is an intelligent man, he knows the Mosaic Law, and he understands the Jewish background. Paul really rejoices in this opportunity to speak to such an instructed man who will understand the true nature of the case. Paul likewise is well instructed in the Mosaic Law, but Paul has met Christ. Now the Law has a new meaning for him. The soul of Paul is flooded with a new light. Now he sees that Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness. Now he knows that God has supplied that which He had demanded. He knows that God is good and that through Christ God is gracious. Paul wants King Agrippa to know this. There is a consummate passion filling the soul of the apostle as he speaks. I think this is his masterpiece. His message on Mars' Hill is great, but it does not compare at all to this message.

Although there were probably several hundred people present to hear this message, Paul is speaking to only one man, King Agrippa. Paul is trying to win this man for Christ.

Paul starts with a very courteous introduction, telling Agrippa how he rejoices in this opportunity. Then he proceeds to give King Agrippa a brief sketch of his youth and background. Then he tells of his conversion. Finally he makes his attempt to reach the man for Christ.

Now first of all I am going to ask you to read this entire message without interruption. Actually it tells its own story. Then I shall make some comments about it.

I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles [[Acts 26:2-23](#)].

After Paul gives a simple explanation of his conduct, which was the natural outcome of his background, he goes on to tell how he lived a Pharisee, and then of the experience he had on the Damascus road.

He said, "I thought I should do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." The Lord Jesus has never had an enemy more bitter and brutal than Saul of Tarsus. He had an inveterate hatred of Jesus Christ and of the gospel. He tells how he wasted the church in Jerusalem and how he shut up many of the saints in prison. This is one reason he could endure two years of prison and such abuse from the religious leaders. He had been one of them. He knew exactly how they felt.

Then in [verse 13](#) he recounts his experience on the Damascus road, how the Lord Jesus waylaid him, how he fell to the ground and heard Jesus speak to him. Then Paul realized he was going against the will of God. Many years later, as he was writing to the Philippians about this experience he said, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" ([Phil. 3:7-8](#)). A revolution really took place in his life. He had trusted religion, but when he met Jesus Christ, he got rid of all his religion. What was gain he counted loss. Jesus Christ, whom he had hated above everything else, became for him the most wonderful Person in his life.

Then Paul describes for Festus and King Agrippa the reality of the vision he had. The Lord commissioned him to preach to the Gentiles and promised to deliver him from them. That was a telling blow since there he stands before these two powerful Gentiles

who cannot touch him because he has appealed to Caesar -- and yet he is able to preach the gospel to them!

Beginning with [verse 19](#), Paul tells his response to the vision that he had. "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." The implication is, "What else could I have done? Wouldn't you have done the same thing?"

From the beginning Paul is making it clear that The Way is a development and fulfillment of the Old Testament. "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" ([v. 22](#)). It is not contrary to the Old Testament.

Now Paul presents the gospel to this man King Agrippa -- and all the crowd assembled there that day heard it. "That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" ([v. 23](#)). I think Paul emphasized that word Gentiles because the king was a Gentile. Notice that he has presented the gospel: that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again. Paul, as always, emphasized the Resurrection. Friend, we should never preach the death of Christ without also preaching about His resurrection. Paul confronts that august assembly with the fact that God has intruded into the history of man and that God has done something for man. God demonstrated His love -- God so loved the world that He gave His Son.

Suddenly there is an interruption. Evidently Governor Festus is on a hot seat.

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice,
Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the
words of truth and soberness [[Acts 26:24-25](#)].

It seems unfortunate that Paul is interrupted at this point. But notice how courteously Paul answers him. Certainly his calm response demonstrates that he is not a madman and he is not a fanatic.

In our day, friend, there are many witnesses, especially ministers, who are so afraid that they won't appear intellectual, but will be considered fanatical, that they do not declare the great truths of the gospel. Friend, we ought to be willing to take the place of madmen -- but not act like them. We should present the gospel soberly as Paul did.

Notice that having answered Governor Festus, Paul went right back to King Agrippa with the question.

For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak
freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden
from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou
believest [[Acts 26:26-27](#)].

It is possible to believe the facts without them being meaningful to you. You may know the facts of the gospel -- that Jesus died for your sins and rose again -- but your relationship to these facts is the thing that is essential.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds [[Acts 26:28-29](#)].

Agrippa was an intelligent man. He answered, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Friend, do you know that you can almost be a Christian and then be lost for time and eternity? How tragic that is! "Almost" will not do. It must be all or nothing. Either you accept Christ or you don't accept Christ. No theologian can probe the depths of salvation and its meaning. Yet it is simple enough for ordinary folk like most of us to understand. Either you have Christ or you don't have Christ. Either you trust Christ or you don't trust Christ. Either He is your Savior or He is not your Savior. It is one of the two. There is no such thing as a middle ground. It cannot be almost. It must be all.

Paul answered, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." Paul is saying that he longs for them to have a relationship to Christ and be like he is -- except for the chains. He wouldn't want chains on anyone. This is the man who had been a proud and zealous Pharisee. This is the man who a few years before bound Christians in chains and put them to death. Now his attitude is different. He wants all people to become Christians and to have a vital and personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

One cannot help but be struck by the mighty transformation that had taken place in Saul of Tarsus. What is the explanation? It is that Jesus was alive! He was back from the dead. This is why Paul said very early in his testimony before Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" There is nothing unreasonable about that. Nineteen hundred years of man's development in knowledge in many fields makes the Resurrection even more credible in our day. Actually, it should be easier for you to believe in the Resurrection than it was for folk in that day.

Since Jesus is back from the dead, there is another and coming judgment. There is another throne, and Jesus is seated upon it. And there is another prisoner -- the prisoner is you or me. Either you have bowed to Him and accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, or you will be accountable to Him in that day. The Resurrection is very important to the unsaved man as well as the saved man.

And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar [[Acts 26:30-32](#)].

It is obvious that Paul is going to Rome now. We have mentioned before that there are those who question whether Paul did the right thing when he appealed to Caesar. Some feel that Paul made a mistake. I don't think it was a mistake at all.

In the Epistle to the Romans Paul expressed his longing to go to Rome. "Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established" ([Rom. 1:10-11](#)).

He is going to Rome all right. You may question whether or not he had a "prosperous journey." I have a friend in the ministry who ran a series of messages for young people (which were tremendous, by the way), and the title of the series was "Paul's Prosperous Journey to Rome." It was a prosperous journey in that it was the will of God that he should go to Rome.

Chapter 27

THEME: Paul goes to Rome via storm and shipwreck

This sea voyage might reasonably be called Paul's fourth missionary journey. He was just as active when he went to Rome, he exercised the same latitude, he made as many contacts, and he witnessed just as faithfully as he had on his other journeys. Chains did not hinder him even though he made this entire journey in chains. He is the one who said, "Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound" ([2Tim. 2:9](#)). Also he wrote to the Philippians that the things which happened to him worked out for the furtherance of the gospel ([Phil. 1:12](#)).

God is in all of this, friend. The trip this time will be a little different from the others. It is to be made at the expense of the Roman government because he is Rome's prisoner. This is the fulfillment of Paul's prayer that he might come to Rome.

When Paul appealed his case to Caesar, he was moved out of the jurisdiction of Festus, the governor, and King Agrippa. As King Agrippa had said after hearing his case, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" ([Acts 26:32](#)). They couldn't do anything about it now; they must send Paul to Rome.

In chapter 27 of Acts we have the record of his voyage to Rome. What we have here might be called the log of the ship. This chapter of Acts has been considered the finest description of a sea voyage in the ancient world that is on record today. Sir William Ramsay made a study of Dr. Luke's writing, and he considers this a masterpiece and the most accurate that has ever been written. So we are coming to another great chapter in the Bible, as you can see.

Those of you who have studied Caesar in Latin may recall the account of the building of a bridge. That has always been a passage that stands out in the memory of all who study Latin because there are so many new words that pertain to the building of a bridge. This chapter in the Greek corresponds to it because there are many technical terms which Dr. Luke uses to describe this voyage.

Let's take off now with the apostle Paul. We're going to take a sea voyage to Rome. This is the final and most exciting travelog in the Book of Acts.

Paul's Prosperous Journey To Rome (27:1-13)

And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band [[Acts 27:1](#)].

This is the beginning of the voyage to Italy. Paul, along with other prisoners, is put in the charge of a centurion by the name of Julius. I would think it safe to say that Paul was the only one of the prisoners who was a Roman citizen. Probably the others were criminals who were sent to Rome for execution. Many of them would become gladiators and would be fed to the wild beasts. In that day there was a constant stream of human life from all corners of the empire that was being fed into the mall of this public vice there in the Colosseum in Rome. These prisoners would be utterly hopeless men. What an opportunity this gave Paul to bring the gospel of hope to this class of men. You will remember that the Lord Jesus Himself said that one of the reasons He came was to set the prisoners free -- free spiritually, delivered from their sins and delivered from their guilt.

This centurion, Julius, was a very courteous pagan, as we shall see.

And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us [[Acts 27:2](#)].

Again, it will be a help if you will follow this voyage on a map. You will notice that now they are going up the coast of Israel. In other words, they don't sail directly out to sea from the point of departure and then arrive at Rome. The ship hovers close to the coastline and goes up the coast of Israel.

And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself [[Acts 27:3](#)].

Sidon is a familiar place to us. Tyre and Sidon are up on the coast in Phoenicia in what is now the country of Lebanon.

Notice the liberty that is granted to the apostle Paul. I am of the opinion that here is a Roman official whom Paul reached with the gospel. His treatment of Paul is gracious. Even the great apostle Paul needed the fellowship and refreshment of Christian brethren. None of us are immune to that. We need the understanding and encouragement of one another.

And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary [[Acts 27:4](#)].

"Under Cyprus" actually means that they came all the way down south of Cyprus, which indicates they were encountering some north winds.

And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia [[Acts 27:5](#)].

We've been with Paul over this water before. They are sailing along the southern coast of Asia Minor, hovering close to the shore along there.

And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein [[Acts 27:6](#)].

If you check on your map, you will see that Myra is sort of a jumping-off place. This was the place at which they changed ships. The centurion found a ship of Alexandria, which means it had come up from northern Africa and was sailing to Italy.

And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone;

And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea [[Acts 27:7-8](#)].

They were headed for the island of Crete. Apparently they were still having difficulty sailing. Contrary winds were the great difficulty for sailing vessels of that day. They passed on the south side of the island and came to Lasea, which is on the south shore of Crete.

Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them [[Acts 27:9](#)].

This means that it was late in the season and that winter was coming on. They had been hoping to get to Rome before the stormy season. It is interesting to note that Paul takes a moral ascendancy at this point. When the sailing became dangerous, Paul admonished them.

And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul [[Acts 27:10-11](#)].

One can certainly understand the centurion. After all, you would expect the captain of the ship to know more about sailing than Paul.

We see Paul under a real testing here. He certainly stands out. He makes a suggestion which, they will find later, should have been followed. The spiritual superiority of Paul is evident at this point. There is no confusion in the life of Paul, no uncertainty, no frustration. He is what would be called a poised personality. Paul knew the way he was going. "This one thing I do" was his declaration when he got to Rome. We can observe these qualities in his behavior throughout the voyage. Paul lived his life as a man in touch with God.

And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might

attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete,
and lieth toward the south-west and northwest [[Acts 27:12](#)].

Crete is an island that lies off the coast of Asia Minor and also off the coast of Greece. It is the largest island and contains several good harbors.

Events are going to prove that Paul was right. Throughout this voyage the captain, the soldiers, and the sailors were depending on human speculation alone. Paul was looking to God.

And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had
obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete
[[Acts 27:13](#)].

To them the voyage was guesswork. The south wind blew softly, so they "supposed." The captain was a man who looked to self and to the wisdom of men. Paul was looking to God. Later on Paul would tell these men, "I believe God" ([v. 25](#)). Notice he would not say that he believed in God, but "I believe God."

Life is a great sea and our lives are little boats. We can sail our boats by human supposition if we so choose. Friend, there is a storm blowing out there, a bit of a gale. The tragedy is that, amid confusion, world chaos, and darkness, most men are still guessing. There are a thousand human plans for building a better world. Yet everywhere we look we see failure. We need men who know God. It was Gladstone who said, "The mark of a great statesman is a man who knows the way God is going for the next fifty years." We don't seem to find many such men around today.

The Storm (27:14-44)

But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called
Euroclydon [[Acts 27:14](#)].

What is Euroclydon? Dr. Luke is using a very technical navigational term of that day. It has to do with the north wind, and it actually came north by east. In other words, the storm came down out of Europe. This was wintertime and the stormy season. It was a "tempestuous wind" and it is in this storm that Paul and all those on the ship with him are caught.

Now I want to stop here to point out something very interesting. You will remember that when Paul was in Ephesus, which was a time of triumph for the gospel, he expressed a great desire to visit Rome. It was the great yearning of his heart. "After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome" ([Acts 19:21](#)). The hour of darkness came for Paul in Jerusalem. It looked as if he would never see Rome at all. In that hour of darkness, despair, and defeat, God appeared to him to reassure him. "And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" ([Acts 23:11](#)). The Lord had assured Paul that he would go to Rome.

And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the
wind, we let her drive.

And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat:

Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship [[Acts 27:15-18](#)].

They were out there in the Mediterranean Sea being driven westward from the island of Crete. It looked very much as if they would be wrecked on the little island of Clauda, which, by the way, is a very small island south of Crete. They had to let the wind take the ship. They threw all the cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship [[Acts 27:19](#)].

They completely stripped the ship of everything that had any weight.

And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away [[Acts 27:20](#)].

Dr. Luke says that "no small tempest" lay on them. We have already seen how Dr. Luke likes to use the diminutive like this. He means that it was really a terrible storm. In fact, they did not think they would escape from it alive. It was in the storm that the voice of the Lord was heard through the lips of Paul.

After fourteen days of wave and wind, the folk on the ship felt that they would not come through alive. They felt like this was it. However, the Lord had appeared to Paul and assured him that he was going to see Rome. With this assurance Paul was able to stand out above the others.

But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island [[Acts 27:21-26](#)].

You can understand that this was a very encouraging word to all those who were on board the ship. In fact, it was the only thing they had to hold onto. Notice the wonderful

testimony of the apostle Paul: "Whose I am, and whom I serve." His confidence was in God: "Be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

It was revealed to Paul that they would be cast upon an island. We will learn later that the island was Melita, which is just south of Sicily. So they had traveled quite a distance across the Mediterranean from the island of Crete. Melita is the island we know today as Malta.

But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country [[Acts 27:27](#)].

"Adria" is the Adriatic Sea. The Adriatic Sea lies between Italy and Macedonia or Greece. Apparently they have been driven up and down the Adriatic in the storm, passing between Crete and Sicily. They are out in the deep, out in the open sea. On the fourteenth night about midnight it becomes apparent that they are being driven near some land.

And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day [[Acts 27:28-29](#)].

Their sounding showed that they were moving in closer to the land. Each sounding showed that the water was becoming more shallow.

Perhaps I should mention here that I have heard sermons on "Four Anchors," and those anchors have been labeled about everything under the sun. Let us not fall into the trap of trying to spiritualize something which is very practical and very realistic. These men were in a ship and they were approaching land. Since they didn't want to be cast upon the rocks, they threw out four anchors. It required all four to hold the ship. If you started to guess how many anchors it would take to hold you or to hold me, you would be trying to spiritualize this passage. In my judgment, that is a very foolish way to handle the Word of God.

And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved [[Acts 27:30-31](#)].

The crew was trying to abandon the ship, you see. They acted as if they were dropping anchor, but actually they were going overboard. They were leaving a sinking ship as the rats leave it. They were doing something which they should never have done.

Paul tells the centurion that the only assurance of safety is for all to remain with the ship. Paul has put his trust in God. What a wonderful thing it is to trust the Word of God. The angel of God had told Paul that he and the men would be saved. But they couldn't be saved their way. They must be saved God's way. God's way was for them to stay with the ship. It was a question of believing that God would save them or not believing and taking

matters into their own hands. Paul had told them that he believed God. And he tells them that if they want to be saved, all will need to stay on board the ship.

Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off
[Acts 27:32].

Paul has given the information to the centurion. The centurion is beginning to listen to Paul now. He gives the command and the soldiers cut the ropes to the life boats. Now everyone must stay on board.

And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you
[Acts 27:33-34].

You know very well, fourteen days of fasting would weaken even the hardest men. Now Paul urges them all to eat. Apparently they had all fasted. The pagans had fasted because they were scared to death. Paul and the Christians may have fasted because they were doing it unto the Lord. Now they are near land and they all need their strength to make it to shore. So Paul uses sanctified sanity in the Lord's service. He uses good sense.

In Christian work we need just good, common, sanctified sense more than in any other area of life. How foolish people can be and at the same time excuse it by saying they are simply trusting the Lord. My friend, the Lord expects us to use some common sense.

And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat [Acts 27:35].

Paul gave thanks to God in the presence of them all. This again is a wonderful testimony. This is Paul's prosperous journey to Rome. Perhaps you are saying, "It doesn't sound very prosperous to me! It seems to me he is out of the will of God!" No, my friend, Paul is not out of the will of God.

Do you remember another instance back in the Gospels when the Lord Jesus put His own disciples into a boat one night and sent them across the Sea of Galilee? He told them to go to the other side, and on the way over a storm arose on the sea. He sent them right into a storm. Now don't say that Jesus didn't know the storm was coming. He deliberately sent them into the storm! He is God. He knew about the storm, and He knew what He was doing. I personally believe that oftentimes the Lord deliberately sends us into a storm. We need to remember that we can be in the storm and still be in the will of God. He has never said we will miss the storms of life, but He has promised us that we will make the harbor. And He will be right there with us through the storm. That is the comfort that should come to the child of God in the time of the storm.

Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls [Acts 27:36-37].

There were 276 people on board -- so it was a sizable ship.

And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea [[Acts 27:38](#)].

They had previously thrown all the cargo overboard. Now they throw all their food overboard.

And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land [[Acts 27:39-44](#)].

Their landing could be considered miraculous, although I am not going to insist that it was a miracle. However, God certainly fulfilled His promise that Paul and all the 276 people on the ship would get to land safely.

Chapter 28

THEME: Paul arrives in Rome

This, our final study in the Book of Acts, follows Paul from Melita to Rome. When Paul arrives in Rome, he ministers first to Jews and then to Gentiles. The narrative is not concluded but breaks off with Paul preaching in Rome. The acts of the Holy Spirit have not been finished even in our day. The Book of Acts will end with the Rapture.

The Landing On Melita (28:1-10)

And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita [[Acts 28:1](#)].

This is the island which we know today as Malta. The bay where this took place is known today as Saint Paul's Bay. This is a very interesting place to those of us who lived during World War II when this island made the headlines at the very beginning of the conflict. It was the most bombed spot of the war because it was in a strategic position. At that time General Darby was the general and the governor of the island. He was a Christian and a

worthy successor to the apostle Paul. He said that he had no notion of surrendering. I think it is interesting to be reading about Paul landing at this bay and to realize that General Darby had command on that same island.

Certainly in the incident of this shipwreck and the landing of Paul on the island of Melita we see the providence of God in the life of the apostle Paul. All of this is recorded for our learning.

And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold [[Acts 28:2](#)].

It may cause us to smile a little that Dr. Luke labels the natives of the island "barbarous people." The word barbarian was used to describe one who did not speak Greek. It does not imply savagery. Here we have another instance of the kindness and the courtesy of pagans. Remember that there are 276 people who have landed on this little island. Out of this crowd, many are criminals who are being sent to Rome for punishment. Yet we find this wonderful compassion and helpfulness on the part of people who are pagans. We find in the Book of Jonah another instance of this same thing when the pagan sailors tried to spare Jonah. They didn't want to throw him overboard even though he had told them they should do it. They tried to bring the ship to land but found out they couldn't do it. Sometimes pagan folk are more gracious than the folk who are religious.

And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand [[Acts 28:3](#)].

You remember that at the end of the Gospel of Mark there is this promise: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" ([Mark 16:17-18](#)). I believe that these signs were confined to that time before the New Testament was completed when the believers needed the sign gifts to substantiate the message of the gospel.

My advice to you today is not to deliberately pick up a rattlesnake. I lived in Tennessee for many years and I have never known an authentic case where someone picked up a rattlesnake during a meeting, was bitten, and was unaffected by the venom of the snake. Most of them die. Those who live through it almost die. The venom has a tremendous effect upon them.

May I point out something else. Paul did not deliberately pick up this viper. Paul was not tempting God. I consider this another evidence that Paul's ". . . thorn in the flesh . . ." ([2Cor. 12:7](#)) was eye trouble. (I'll develop that when we get to the Epistle to the Galatians.) Paul couldn't see very well. When he picked up some sticks, there was a viper on the sticks and Paul just didn't see it.

There is another interesting sidelight to the apostle Paul that I want you to notice here: the great apostle Paul gathered sticks. These people on the island had been very gracious to them. They had accepted 276 strangers who landed there. It was cold and rainy, and they

had started a big fire to help warm these people who had come in from the sea. When the fire began to go down, Paul went out to gather a bundle of sticks. This should dispel any notion that Paul was a lazy preacher. He himself tells us that he practiced his trade as a tentmaker so that he would not be a burden to the church. Obviously he was not afraid of work.

When Paul threw the sticks onto the fire, the viper would naturally crawl away from the fire. The viper not only bit Paul but actually fastened onto his hand.

And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live [[Acts 28:4](#)].

The Greek word here for "vengeance" is *dike* which actually would be better translated "justice." "Yet justice suffereth not to live." In other words, they felt that Paul was guilty of a great crime, and justice was catching up with him. He had escaped from the sea but now he would surely die of the venom. Very frankly, I think they sat down to watch what would happen to him. They expected that any moment he would begin to show swelling in his hand and arm, then would fall down dead. They knew by sad experience, as that is what had happened to their own people. They expected it to happen to Paul.

Notice that these pagans did have a sense of justice. They assumed that Paul was a murderer and that he deserved punishment. In such a circumstance today, folk would be helping the criminal to get back out to sea to escape being punished. This incident shows that throughout the Roman Empire there was a sense of justice. Pagan Rome made that contribution to the world. Rome was noted for justice, not mercy. Sins were not forgiven. If you broke the law, you paid the penalty. Under the iron heel of Rome the world was crying for mercy. This was a preparation for the coming of Christ who came as the Savior from sin -- that mankind might know the mercy and forgiveness of God.

And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god [[Acts 28:5-6](#)].

The promise of God in [Mark 16:18](#) was fulfilled in Paul's experience. He suffered no ill effects from the venom. When folk today deliberately pick up snakes and claim that promise as their protection, they are far afield from what God had in mind.

When they saw that no harm came to Paul, they decided that he certainly could not be a criminal but was instead a god. Although they were equally as wrong in this judgment, it did give Paul a very important contact on the island of Melita here.

In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him [[Acts 28:7-8](#)].

Paul was now exercising his gift as an apostle. He entered in and he prayed. Apparently he did not pray for the man; he prayed for himself. That is, he prayed to determine the will of God. Was this man to be healed through Paul? That is what he prayed to know.

So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary [[Acts 28:9-10](#)].

The question has been raised whether or not Paul preached the gospel in Melita. There are those who believe that this is one place where Paul did not preach. This is an instance where I think the Holy Spirit expects us to use ordinary common sense. Of course, he preached the gospel. We are coming to the end of the book, and the incident is related in a very brief and blunt manner. By now Dr. Luke expects us to know what Paul would do. Remember that Paul is the man who wrote, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" ([1Cor. 2:2](#)). With the apostles, healing was God's witness that the gospel they preached was from Him. It is very important for us to realize that Paul preached the gospel and that the healing was the result of it. It was the evidence of the truth he was preaching. I think it can be only a normal inference that Paul did exactly the same here as he did everywhere he went.

The Voyage Continues (28:11-15)

And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux [[Acts 28:11](#)].

Since Paul stayed in Melita for three months, it is evident that the few verses given to us here are not the complete story of his ministry on that island. Therefore, I think we can be sure that Paul preached the gospel.

"Castor and Pollux," the sign of their ship, were gods of the Romans. There is still a pillar to them in the Roman Forum.

And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.

And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli [[Acts 28:12-13](#)].

The storm is over. The Euroclydon, that tempestuous wind from the north, is passed. Now there is a south wind blowing again.

Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.

And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage [[Acts 28:14-15](#)].

Paul is now on the Appian Way. Again we see how important the encouragement of believers was to the apostle Paul.

Paul In Rome (28:16-31)

And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him [[Acts 28:16](#)].

Paul apparently had the freedom to live in a house, but he was always guarded by a soldier. In fact, different soldiers took turns on guard duty.

And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had aught to accuse my nation of.

For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain [[Acts 28:17-20](#)].

We see Paul following his usual pattern of approaching the Jews first. He explains to them why he has been brought to Rome.

And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not [[Acts 28:21-24](#)].

We see here the kind of liberty that Paul had as a prisoner. Apparently he could have quite large crowds come to his home. However, there was always a soldier on guard to watch him.

Again we see that the apostle Paul used his background in the Old Testament to persuade the Jews concerning Jesus. As always, there was the double response to the message. Some believed, but others did not.

And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him [[Acts 28:25-31](#)].

The Book of Acts tells of the beginning of the movement of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Remember that in the Garden of Eden man doubted God and that led to disobedience. The way back to God is by faith, ". . . for obedience to the faith . . ." as Paul says in [Romans 1:5](#). So we find in that day that some believed the gospel and some did not.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence." The record is not concluded. The Holy Spirit continues to work today. The acts of the Holy Spirit have not been finished even in our day. The Book of Acts will end with the Rapture, the coming of Christ for His own. The work of the church has not yet been completed; it is a continuing story. What you and I have done in the power of the Holy Spirit will be included in that record.

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